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THE

MAN IN CHAINS

BY

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ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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THE MAN IN CHAINS.

CHAPTER I.

SEVERN BARNES IS SENT TO ITALY.

GREAT changes are effected in the course of twelve months; that space of time is long or short, according to the events which have passed within it; indeed, the same observation holds good with regard to a day or a hundred years. A powerful dynasty may to-day be in possession of a brilliant throne, and to-morrow it may be skulking out of the kingdom under the protection of an *alias*. A mighty army may be glittering in its glory and appointments in the morning sun, and in the evening be scattered powerless and in flight. The whole world and all that

inhabit it are but the puppets of perpetual change, a change so unvarying, so anomalously the same for ever, that we have a saying circulating amongst us, and that has come down from a most remote and unrecorded age, that there is nothing new beneath the sun.

Twelve months' time has produced a striking change in the appearance of Severn Barnes; he has shot up from the sprightly youth into the smart young man, albeit he is but young in years still. He has been an apt pupil to Mr. Spaltok, who speaks of him to Silvester Langdale with the pride of a professional man who has produced a prize. Yes, Mr. Spaltok is proud of his pupil, and ventures confidently to predict that he is destined to rise to eminence in the musical world.

Severn Barnes has been a studious pupil under the guidance of Mr. Spaltok, the conductor of the orchestra, and musical

director of the Harmonic Hall. He has, however, been a pupil only. During his service with Silvester Langdale he had not been employed in the chorus at all; indeed, even if there had been no other objection to this—and there were objections, of course, when he entered into Silvester Langdale's service — a change, the usual natural change, had taken place in Severn Barnes's voice, and it had become a magnificent tenor, untinged with the least falsetto. The instructions which Mr. Spaltok had given him had embraced music generally, and the youth had become tolerably proficient on the piano, for he was a most apt scholar generally, and especially in all matters connected with music. He had not continued wholly as Silvester Langdale's clerk—that occupation had of late been a very subordinate part of his duty. The business which the young barrister had

obtained had long ago necessitated a much more experienced attendant than Severn Barnes, and Silvester Langdale had succeeded in obtaining a middle-aged clerk, who, in addition to a stoic devotion to his duty in his sphere, had conceived an almost romantic notion of the mental power of the young orator whom he served. In this, however, the middle-aged clerk merely elaborated in his own mind and predilections the general verdict of the world of society by whom Silvester Langdale was surrounded.

These two, the middle-aged clerk and Severn Barnes, were installed in the chambers in the Temple as soon as Silvester Langdale became the occupier of the house in Grosvenor Square.

Strange association though it may seem, Severn Barnes received most of his instructions from Mr. Spaltok in the chambers in the Temple; indeed young

Severn Barnes might be said to have combined the duties of housekeeper of the chambers with his other avocations with which Mr. Spaltok was principally connected. The young man studied hard and pertinaciously in those chambers in the Temple, and every night during the summer time the sounds of instrumental music and the notes of a melodious voice might have been heard rolling over the charming gardens that are on the river side, and which else would have been all quietude, albeit that they are within an arrow's flight of that ceaseless din that rolls through Temple Bar.

Silvester Langdale himself has in twelve months risen into high eminence in his profession; his has been a course of uninterrupted success. He has advanced in wealth, in station, and we must add, in embarrassment. He has not been reckless; as we have seen, he has always prided

himself upon the absence of such a fault; but he has been, and is, entirely thoughtless as to the future. Short as his brilliant career has been, he has anticipated much of its future proceeds. Silvester Langdale is now in other hands besides those of Marl Baskerville, and he has forged many of those unseen chains which hang so heavily, and yet so lightly, upon those by whom they are self-imposed.

Silvester Langdale would seem to be incapable of thinking of the future; he would enter into engagements for some three months hence, and having removed the exigencies of the moment, he would think no more of the new fetters which he had placed about his neck, and so, from time to time, he would find himself struggling in a maze, from which he seemed to be inextricable; but he was never without wealth at his command His income was a large one, and was

constant, and was increasing, and with every probability of continuing to increase; and so, while the desires of the moment were satisfied, Silvester Langdale thought not of the future, albeit that future might be almost said to be constantly upon him. His future with the present, each month, was becoming more intimately blended, as it were; and yet every day he flattered himself, without forethought or the least calculation, that shortly he would be beyond the rising annoyance to which the wearing of his unseen chains so continually subjected him; and so, from time to time, suddenly would rise up before him new and unanticipated results of former want of forethought; and thus was he kept bound in fetters that were strengthening daily. But Silvester Langdale cared not for them as yet. Twelve months ago his prospects looked, and were, indeed bright; but what were they

compared with the future that was opening out before him now? The twelvemonth's time has wrought a change in him and in his prospects truly. Lord Montalban's predilection for the young barrister has strengthened with his knowledge of his young friend, and, as all the sagacious world prognosticated, there could be but one result to the young man's visit to the peer's house. The course of Silvester Langdale's true love ran smoothly indeed, for Augusta Montalban had brought herself gradually to love him ardently, and she was his adoration. Augusta Montalban had gone on accumulating comparisons between the Marquis of Milltown and the barrister in the Temple, until her soul became so blended, as it were, with the name of Silvester Langdale, that if Lord Montalban had entertained any objection to the match, he would not have dared to

openly express it. His daughter was a part of his own soul, and he had never denied her anything, and now she ruled an empress over his will. It had therefore been arranged that, in the spring of the next year, Silvester Langdale should marry Augusta Montalban. It is true, that Lord Montalban, when the proposal was made to him—and it was made by Miss Montalban herself, rather in the nature of unrepressed determination than that of an appeal—did impose a kind of implied condition. Of course his daughter should marry Silvester Langdale, because she wished to do so, and had made up her mind to do so; and all he would ask from Silvester Langdale was, that he should make an effort to get into Parliament, because, as Lord Montalban argued with the Duke of Chaumontel one morning when discussing the matter, "the sooner he gets into Parliament, the

sooner is he likely to be Lord Chancellor."

We need scarcely say, that when the intended alliance was first proposed to the Duke of Chaumontel, that august and fossil personage was thrown into a state of horror by it. "Did Montalban forget that he was of the blood of the Chaumontels, and that the branches of the Chaumontel tree drew their heraldic life-blood from roots that were planted in the soil when the Heptarchy was in its meridian strength and splendour? The blood of the Chaumontels had never been crossed in the female line, and surely Montalban was not the man to engraft a spurious blossom on the tree. The male scions of the noble house, he conceded, might elevate new blood to an alliance, but that was a very different thing to Augusta Montalban marrying a barrister. Montalban must remember it,

damn it!" and the Duke of Chaumontel flourished his cane, and struck his Hessian boots with it.

But Lord Montalban was utterly powerless in the matter, whatever his feelings were. He probably could have wished that his daughter had fixed her choice upon the heir of the Chaumontels; but then she had refused to do so, and there was an end of the matter. At all events, after the Duke of Chaumontel was gone, Lord Montalban congratulated himself that he was in a much better position with regard to these matters than the Duke was; for he would much rather be the father of a daughter who could marry a Silvester Langdale, than of a son who could marry a Marie Wingrave. He was on the point once or twice of saying this to the Duke, but he wisely refrained from doing so.

And then, again, when Lord Montalban

was alone, he reasoned from another starting-point upon the matter. His daughter had fixed her determination, therefore it was irrevocable. She might have fixed her choice upon a penniless adventurer, a spendthrift, or a ruined *roué*. What would their prospects then have been! Lord Montalban had for years past been gradually becoming more and more embarrassed financially, and it was no little consolation to know that Silvester Langdale was a young man rising into a high position,—at least, so Lord Montalban felt and believed; and he had come to the conclusion—gradually, no doubt—that, after all, Silvester Langdale might be a very good match for his daughter.

Silvester Langdale undoubtedly was preparing himself for the elevated position in which he was ere long to be placed. He had already, as we have seen,

located himself in the Middle Temple, but he could not live there, he could not take his bride to such a locality; and so he had become the tenant and the occupant of a house off Grosvenor Square, and had thus become a near neighbour of Lord Montalban. He had furnished his house in a manner that would be worthy of his approaching alliance, and he had ensconced Abel Barnes as his general manager, as it were, and made the wife of Abel Barnes his housekeeper. Indeed, Silvester Langdale almost suddenly found himself in the midst of a household; for in the course of his professional avocations he had become connected casually with a friend who had a strong attachment to him, but who, after a brief illness, was cut off in his prime. This friend, so made, left behind him to the care of Silvester Langdale a young daughter, wholly friendless now, but tolerably well pro-

vided for by certain property that was situated in the West India islands. This young girl, who was about fifteen years of age, was therefore now an inmate of Silvester Langdale's house, under the care of the wife of Abel Barnes, and in the guardianship of Silvester Langdale himself.

After an interval of twelve months we meet with Silvester Langdale again in the drawing-room of his house, near to Grosvenor Square, and we find with him no less a personage than Mr. Spaltok himself.

"Sir," Mr. Spaltok is saying, "I think I have done all that can be done for him in England, and I believe that he will mellow into one of the finest tenors that this country has ever produced. I am just about old enough to remember Incledon, and I should say that his voice is very similar to that of the great tenor of those days."

Of course Mr. Spaltok is speaking of Severn Barnes, and the progress the youth has made in his vocal studies.

"I am very glad to hear your good opinion of him, Mr. Spaltok," said Silvester Langdale, "because it justifies a determination to which I have come. He has been very faithful to me—his father has been my faithful, and I might almost add, my affectionate servitor—and so I have resolved to give the boy a start in life; indeed, I have determined upon sending him to Italy."

At this intimation Mr. Spaltok opens his mouth in gratified astonishment, and he elevates his eyebrows with so much energy, that the points of his countenance quite glow again.

"Sir," he says, "the resolution does you honour, and I am sure you will reap the reward you deserve, in seeing Severn

Barnes, one of these days, a great celebrity on the lyric stage."

"That will be for himself," said Mr. Langdale; "I am merely placing the means in his hands to enable him to climb to eminence, if he can."

"I am sure of the result," said Mr. Spaltok.

"I expect the youngster here in a few minutes; I have sent his father for him, as I desired to inform him in your presence of what I purpose doing for him."

Silvester Langdale had scarcely said this when a knock was heard at the door, and immediately afterwards both Abel Barnes and his son entered the room. They had both changed in appearance remarkably for the better since the time when we last held communion with them. Abel Barnes himself looked a jovial, burly, good-humoured yeoman; there was good-humour marked palpably upon his big

round face, and all the traces of his ancient mode of life—traces that were indented deeply enough when we first saw him — seemed to have been smoothed away; and, contrary to the usual order of nature, Time appeared to have brushed his hand across the face of Abel Barnes, simply to rub out the scars that might be wrinkles now.

And Severn Barnes is a tall, handsome youth; he seems to have started into manhood since we last saw him, for he looks much older than he really is.

Mr. Spaltok receives both Abel Barnes and his son very graciously, and observes to the latter that he is now on the high road to fortune indeed.

This allusion, however, of Mr. Spaltok is not at all understood by young Severn Barnes, seeing that he is wholly unacquainted with the intentions of Silvester Langdale with regard to him. He is

therefore doubtful whether Mr. Spaltok is indulging in banter, or has some occult meaning of his own in the observation he has just made.

"The good wish that is implied in your observation, Mr. Spaltok," Silvester Langdale observes, "is doubtless scarcely understood by our young friend here, because he is as yet ignorant of the course I propose to adopt with regard to him."

At this intimation a peculiar expression might have been observed upon the countenance of young Severn Barnes, an expression which was an admixture of doubt, apprehension, curiosity, and satisfaction. Silvester Langdale did not fail to observe this, and he smiled as he said, turning to Severn Barnes—

"I have been talking to Mr. Spaltok about the progress you have made in what, I suppose, I must call your profession, and he has informed me that you

have reached the limit of the course of instruction that he is enabled to give you."

The expression upon the countenance of Severn Barnes is now one that is wholly of apprehension, because he fears that the generous support he has received from his patron is about to be withdrawn. He is, however, speedily reassured; for Silvester Langdale says, addressing the quondam pugilist and present attached servitor—

"As a kind of recognition of your services, Abel, and as an incentive to himself, I propose to send your son to Italy, there to prosecute and complete his studies."

At this intimation the bearing and behaviour of Abel Barnes are remarkable and peculiar. It surely cannot be; and now we look again there is no mistake about it—the big, hearty, honest, burly fellow is crying like a child; and he is trembling too.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Abel?" Silvester Langdale inquires, laughing, and yet himself feeling something like the emotion that is agitating the sturdy frame of Abel Barnes.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Abel? If any of your former backers were to see you now, what would they say?"

"Why, they'd say, sir, what was true, —that I couldn't come up to time, and you might knock me down with a feather."

"Why, then, if I needed such assistance, I am afraid that I should have but a sorry dependence, eh?" and Silvester Langdale laughed most good-humouredly at this.

But the allusion instantly braces Abel Barnes up, as it were, and he is a muscular giant again as he exclaims fervently, and at the same time clenching both his fists,—

"Lord! shouldn't I like to catch anybody a-touching your honour!"

Severn Barnes does not know whether to laugh or cry, but he is much excited; and Mr. Spaltok, he stands in the centre of the group, like a melodramatic and rubicund father in the midst of "a striking situation," as the imaginative playbill designates it.

"Yes, Abel, I have decided upon sending him to Italy to make his own way in the world. I shall supply him with what I may consider to be sufficient to carry him along, but he must understand that he will be entirely dependent upon his own exertions for the future, and it will be in his conduct in that future that I shall expect to find my return for what I now do."

Is there anything that he in this world could possibly have accomplished that Abel Barnes would not at that moment

have done for Silvester Langdale? He was indeed in heart and soul his willing and devoted slave.

"Run then to your wife, Abel, and inform her that I have determined upon dismissing Severn, and sending him far away."

"Oh, Mr. Langdale," cried a fair-haired, sweet-complexioned little girl, running into the room, "here is such a peculiar-looking man, with such a large beard, and such strange-looking eyes, waiting down-stairs to see you."

The little girl had rushed into the room so impetuously, not knowing that any one was with Mr. Langdale, that she did not observe, until she had concluded her announcement, who was with him. She turned and looked at Severn Barnes, and seemed quite flurried; and as she ran out again she cried—

"Oh, Mr. Langdale, I did not know

there was anybody with you." She clearly thought that Severn Barnes was of much more importance than either Abel Barnes or Mr. Spaltok.

It was with no little exertion that Abel Barnes could tear himself out of that room; he could have fallen down and worshipped Silvester Langdale. Langdale, leaving his three clients for a few minutes, went down to see the strange man.

It was only Marl Baskerville.

CHAPTER II.

AMBITION STILL LEADS SILVESTER LANGDALE ONWARDS.

As Marl Baskerville sits in the small waiting-room of Silvester Langdale's house, he soliloquizes upon the rapid progress in fortune of the young man he is seeking.—"It is an astounding change!" he muses. "It is scarcely twelve months since I conveyed to him his first brief in the poor chambers in Gray's Inn, and now I am waiting in his house that is one of the mansions of the great"—and then Baskerville smiles, as though his thoughts had suddenly taken a different course, as indeed they had, for he con-

tinues—"Yes, amongst the mansions of the great, and near to yours, Montalban, and you little know, Montalban, through whose agency chiefly, the close proximity was brought about, and now it seems that there is much probability that your two houses will be more closely united still, and I may be instrumental to that end too. Strange, indeed, are the links that form the chains of man's destiny. If I had studiously worked to that end, I might never have succeeded in securing an instrument to my hopes such as this young Langdale bids fair to become in my hands. He must rise to eminence after his marriage, in order that the sacrifice should be the greater. Must rise! alas indeed, he has risen already beyond even his sanguine hopes. But he must marry your daughter, Lord Viscount Montalban—he must become a part of your household, and your circle, and he

must mount still higher yet before I claim from you the just reward to which I shall be entitled for the efforts in his behalf that I shall have made to make him worthy of the position of son-in-law of Lord Viscount Montalban—that reward which can be paid in one way only, and which can take no material form—that reward which shall be given to my own soul, to be treasured and kept for ever in my heart."

This strange reverie was interrupted by Silvester Langdale hastily entering the room, and exclaiming in a light-hearted tone, "Good morning, Baskerville; I hope they haven't made me keep you waiting long in this lively room;" and he laughed, as he said this.

"Considering the demands that are now so urgently made upon you, I suppose I ought to consider myself fortunate in seeing you at all," said Marl Basker-

ville, with an expression of face and a tone of voice which rendered it difficult to say whether the observation ought to be taken as badinage or compliment.

"But that I know you do not mean anything by it, I think I should feel some little annoyance at such an observation as that."

This was not said in a tone of irritation at all. It was said good-humouredly, and he added—

"Who, I should like to know, has a greater right to claim attention from me than Marl Baskerville?"

And at this Silvester Langdale laughed.

Marl Baskerville smiled too. It was an expressive smile, but a smile only. Marl Baskerville never laughed.

"Nay, more," continued Silvester Langdale, "I am very glad indeed that you have called this morning, for I have much to say to you, much to tell

you, and not a little to ask your advice upon."

Why, Marl Baskerville knew all this as well as Silvester Langdale did himself. He knew—it might almost be said intuitively—at all events he knew, that the hopes of the young barrister were now more flush than ever. That they pointed to objects of which but a few months before he could never have dreamed, and he, that inscrutable man, had now called, not only to fan those hopes but to create additional ones. Marl Baskerville, as we have seen, had twined chains about Silvester Langdale which now encircled him wholly, but yet the young man looked upon the lawyer money-lender as his best friend and adviser. Marl Baskerville appeared to take such an unselfish interest in all that concerned the young man, that Silvester Langdale had come to look upon him in the

light of a mentor whose counsel was unerring.

"But come, Baskerville, don't let us stop here; come up stairs with me, where you will see some people with whom I think you are acquainted;" and as Silvester Langdale said this he smiled significantly. "I want you to see them for a few moments before they go, and then I wish to consult you on some private matters of my own. Come."

And Silvester Langdale led the way from the small waiting-room to the apartment in which he had left Mr. Spaltok and Severn Barnes.

The moment Mr. Spaltok saw Marl Baskerville, he ran his fingers vigorously through his hair, and exclaimed rather energetically—

"Why, Lord bless her gracious Majesty, Mr. Baskerville, whoever would have thought of seeing you here?"

"I do believe, Baskerville," cried Silvester Langdale, laughing merrily, "that you must be acquainted with the whole world, and that all the world must be acquainted with you."

"And that I believe, Mr. Langdale, is the veritable fact," said Mr. Spaltok, running his fingers over an airy piano. "If Mr. Baskerville doesn't know everybody, everybody knows Mr. Baskerville; that is about the fact, sir, isn't it?" and the musical professor bowed to Mr. Baskerville.

"I was not aware that I was so notorious," said Marl Baskerville, with his shadowy smile.

"Notorious! No, I did not mean that, sir," said Mr. Spaltok, deprecatingly. "I meant famous, sir. That's the proper word, isn't it?"

Well, perhaps it was, in Mr. Spaltok's point of view. He had never had any

direct dealings with Marl Baskerville himself, but he was well acquainted with those who had. Marl Baskerville had had much to do with theatrical speculators and theatrical professors. His influence had extended through an unseen, though not unfelt, agency into that region which is mysteriously known under the appellation of the green-room; but his influence had perhaps been much more palpably felt in another, and perhaps an equally mysterious compartment, behind the scenes of a theatre, and which is known to the initiated as the treasury.

"Talking of being famous," said Mr. Spaltok, "an arrangement has been this day made in this room, which I hope may result in the production of a celebrity;" and Mr. Spaltok, as he said this, drew himself up—so much up, indeed, that he looked quite puffed about the chest, with

his surtout so tightly buttoned as it was; and as he spoke, he looked towards Severn Barnes, who, we need scarcely say, felt not a little confused by the reference Mr. Spaltok was making.

Marl Baskerville, however, did not at all understand it, and therefore he said to the professor.

"Indeed! In what way do you mean?"

Before, however, Mr. Spaltok could explain in what way he did mean, Silvester Langdale interposed and said—

"Yes, that was one of the things I alluded to in coming up stairs. I dare say you do not recollect this young man?"

"Not recollect him. Why not?" said Marl Baskerville. "Your clerk, Abel Barnes's son, isn't it?"

"Oh, sir, I have seen this gentleman several times at chambers," said young

Barnes, reddening a little. He was but a boy still, and he felt a boyish embarrassment at being thus prominently noticed.

"You may have seen him, I do not doubt, but I don't suppose you have heard him," said Silvester Langdale, smiling.

"Heard him! What do you mean?"

"Well, perhaps Mr. Spaltok will explain," said Silvester Langdale, waving his hand towards that gentleman.

Explain! of course it was what Mr. Spaltok was eager and anxious to do; and so introducing the subject with the preludium on his hair, he informed Marl Baskerville of the very wonderful natural gift which young Severn Barnes possessed, and of the decision at which Silvester Langdale had arrived with respect to him.

"And, sir," added Mr. Spaltok, in an oracular tone, "I believe we shall have

something to be proud of when we see what comes of it."

Marl Baskerville mused upon this intelligence for a moment, and after he had thus turned it over in his mind, he looked towards Mr. Spaltok, as though inquiring if he had anything further to communicate. It is to be assumed that he had not, because Mr. Spaltok did not say anything. He stood erect and almost motionless, like a monument of a stout gentleman, who felt that he had magnanimously discharged a public duty for which he was about to receive the approbation of his fellow-countrymen. Mr. Spaltok evidently felt the importance of his position, and with becoming dignity maintained it.

"Well, what do you think of it, Baskerville?" inquired Silvester Langdale.

"That it does you infinite honour," returned that gentleman; "and I hope

this young man"—and as he spoke he turned to Severn Barnes—"will never forget, whatever may be his fate or fortune, the debt of gratitude he will owe to you. It may be, that I shall have an opportunity of observing how he pays it."

Marl Baskerville had no suspicion in his mind when he made this commonplace observation; an observation that in itself was merely a platitude, and nothing more; and yet there have been cases, and probably will be again, when such an observation, made under similar circumstances, might be taken to be a foreshadowing of a probable contingency.

Whatever was the current of Marl Baskerville's thoughts upon the subject at the moment, it was turned into another direction by a little incident in the scene, which he was the first to observe. The door of the room was gently opened for a

little way, and the laughing face of the fair-haired little girl appeared peeping into the room. She looked at Severn Barnes with an expression on her countenance that might have been taken for an invitation to a game at romps; and then, seeing that she was observed by the others in the room, she, with a merry laugh, drew her head back and closed the door.

Marl Baskerville looked inquiringly towards Silvester Langdale.

"My little ward," said Langdale, in answer to the appealing look; "the solemn, the sacred charge left to me by poor Henry Lebar; a charge that I will cherish before any tie that I can possibly form."

The young man spoke earnestly, almost tearfully; and perhaps there was no one present at that moment who more touchingly felt the fervency of the declaration

than young Severn Barnes, who gazed upon his patron with a look of admiring reverence.

"And now, perhaps, sir," said Mr. Spaltok, as though he had made a discovery, "we had better take our leave."

Marl Baskerville intimated by a look, which was quite as expressive as words would have been, that Mr. Spaltok was right in his conjecture.

"You two gentlemen have business together, of course?" said Mr. Spaltok. "Now Severn, my boy, I am walking Temple Bar way, so we will walk together if you like."

Severn Barnes looked to his patron as though for instructions.

"Yes," said Silvester Langdale, "and I dare say Mr. Spaltok will be able to give you some advice with regard to your intended probation in Italy."

"The very thing I meant when I said

I was walking Temple Bar way," said Mr. Spaltok, blandly smiling.

And so the professor and Severn Barnes took their departure together, leaving Silvester Langdale and Marl Baskerville to their consultations.

As soon as Mr. Spaltok with Severn Barnes had quitted the apartment, Marl Baskerville, as was his custom, placed himself between the light from the windows and the young barrister.

"I have not come upon my usual errand," he said, with his peculiar smile.

Silvester Langdale but too well understood the allusion. The usual errand had reference to those chains which Marl Baskerville had been the means of throwing round Silvester Langdale, and in which he might be said to be inextricably bound. At all events Marl Baskerville intended that he should be so. In his bearing and in his conduct towards Sil-

vester Langdale, the money-lender seemed a strange anomaly. He appeared to be actuated by two antagonistic desires with regard to Langdale; the one to advance him in his profession and in his position in society, and the other to encompass him in a mesh, which he, perhaps better than any man living, knew must ultimately produce ruinous consequences. He knew that he was an agent through whom the ultimate ruin of Silvester Langdale was to be produced, and yet he had within him something approaching to a genuine feeling of satisfaction at the figure that Silvester Langdale was making in the world. It was but natural, therefore, that the young and now eminent barrister should be deceived in the character of the man; and it is not very surprising that he should have, as we have seen, placed himself entirely within his power. Silvester Langdale believed that Marl Bas-

kerville was his true and sterling friend. He had easily brought himself into this belief; but perhaps that which had settled and confirmed it was the unmistakable desire of Marl Baskerville to strengthen the connection which already existed between Silvester Langdale and Lord Montalban. Langdale did not know it; but Baskerville had taken means that were secret to strengthen that association; for the man had a purpose, or believed he had, of his own to serve. Oh, yes. Silvester Langdale looked upon Marl Baskerville as his very good friend indeed.

"I have not come upon my usual errand," said this very good friend.

"No, indeed, I should hope not," replied Langdale; "for if you had, it is not unlikely that you would get your usual answer;" and so he laughed, as though he were referring to a light and trivial matter.

"I am always thinking, and very frequently working for your advancement," said Marl Baskerville.

"I have had many sterling proofs of the fact."

"I am working for your advancement at this moment."

"And now you are going to tell me how?" said Silvester Langdale, almost child-like.

"I am," said Marl Baskerville, very seriously. "I want to see you on the road that leads to the bench."

"Surely I am upon that road already;" and Silvester again laughed.

"On the road! yes," replied Marl Baskerville thoughtfully, "but I desire to see you in that groove of it, upon which advancement is both rapid and easy."

"Ah, now I must confess that I don't exactly comprehend you," said Silvester Langdale, not laughing this time.

"I think you will immediately. Your ambition points beyond the bar I hope?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I have never put the query to myself, yet; and therefore, I suppose I must say that hitherto it has not. But what is it you mean? for, of course, you have some definite meaning and object in these mysterious allusions of yours."

"Of course I have. You know that some people say, I never do anything without a definite object and without a motive," and Marl Baskerville spoke in a tone which might have led to the inference that he was gratified by the association.

"Well, then, what is your object, and what your motive now?"

"I should like to see you a legislator as well as a pleader."

"What, the House of Commons you mean?"

"Yes."

"Humph! I must confess that my own desire would point that way too; but why have you come to question me, and make a suggestion upon such a subject at this moment?"

"Because I have been put in possession of a secret, which, seeing my connection with you, assumes the shape of a prophetic coincidence in my mind."

Of course, Silvester Langdale asked Marl Baskerville what that could be?

"I have occasionally, as you know," he replied, "something to do with both sides of Westminster Hall: those who make the laws are on one side, and those who administer them are on the other. I have to-day been in communication with some friends of mine who range themselves amongst the former. In fact, to speak plainly, I really have been electioneering."

"Indeed! Where is there a vacancy?" inquired Silvester Langdale, rather eagerly.

"Nowhere, just at this moment."

"Is it likely there will be one soon?"

"It is."

"Where?"

"Sabrinster."

"What!" almost shouted Silvester Langdale.

"Now, I presume you see the coincidence I spoke of a minute or two ago," said Marl Baskerville, with his very meaning and peculiar smile.

"And you wish me to stand for my native city?" This in a tone that very nearly approached excitement.

"Sabrinster your native city?" inquired Marl Baskerville.

"I look upon it as such, although I believe I was not actually born there; but that is no matter, you think I should

have a chance of success if I were to become a candidate?" Silvester Langdale eagerly inquired.

"Such is my impression."

Silvester Langdale paced the room, for he felt excited.

"You are agitated by this news, I can see," said Marl Baskerville, watching the action of the young man, "and perhaps it is but natural that you should be. Come and sit down again, and let us talk the matter over."

And Silvester Langdale seated himself again, and they did talk the matter over, and Marl Baskerville informed his *protégé*, for such he now seemed really to be, that the actual vacancy would not take place just yet, but the moment it was determined upon he would be the first to receive the information. So much had he this matter at heart, that he, that man of mystery and strange life, had deter-

mined in the interest of his young friend to go down to Sabrinster to see how the land lay, for it so happened that he had some special business of his own down in that quarter, and so he could kill two birds with one stone. And thus did he talk the matter over, and so adroitly too, that when Marl Baskerville took his leave, Silvester Langdale felt that already a new life was opening to him, more brilliant than that which great success had already made for him.

CHAPTER III.

THE ELECTION.

Silvester Langdale's professional business continues with each succeeding term to increase and extend, and his embarrassments—for such the periodical demands that are made upon him amount to—would seem to keep pace with it. Still they have hitherto been simply inconveniences, in no case prudentially anticipated, and only considered when they have presented themselves. And although he is but a young bachelor, his house expenses have been very considerable, for he has lived, and is living, in a style

that is in accordance with the circle in which he moves, and of the locality in which he resides. Still the position which he has won for himself, perhaps, may be taken to excuse, if not to justify, such a course and such an expenditure. He is, doubtless, lavish and improvident, but he is ardent and young, and believes that he has an inexhaustible mine under his control. He is in chains, it is true, but they are chains that sit lightly upon him, and do not gall him as yet. Marl Baskerville, and those with whom he acts, or with whom he says he acts, may be his evil genii, but they have only appeared in attractive guise at present; and Marl Baskerville, although he has bound the young barrister to him, even as though he were his slave, is anything but a hard taskmaster. He would seem, indeed, if we found the conclusion upon a superficial view, to be rather a guardian

spirit than a pursuing fiend; for while he is the tempter, he is also the good adviser, —at least, he tenders good advice upon occasions. Marl Baskerville is acquainted with the engagement that has been made between Silvester Langdale and Augusta Montalban. Langdale was eager enough to inform him of it, even at the moment that it was contracted, but he was too joyous and full of spirits to observe that, when he made the communication to Marl Baskerville, the peculiar eyes of that somewhat inscrutable individual lighted up with an expression which was not pleasant to behold. It was that expression which Count Moule had not failed to observe, and of which he had spoken to Silvester Langdale—an expression which was similar to that which the tiger exhibits when in a state of irritation. From the moment, however, that Silvester Langdale conveyed the inti-

mation to the lawyer-money-lender, Marl Baskerville seemed to have become more assiduous in his attentions to the young barrister, and to be more desirous of serving him. Instead of Silvester Langdale being the fettered slave of Marl Baskerville, the money-lender seemed to be the willing bondsman of the barrister; and so, although the causes of his embarrassments—his periodical embarrassments, were steadily increasing, they were made to sit lightly upon him for the time, and Marl Baskerville was the good friend indeed.

Marl Baskerville seemed to live but to advance the interests of Silvester Langdale. He it was as we have seen who was the first to convey the information to Langdale that a vacancy was about to occur in the parliamentary representation of the city in which he had passed all his youth, and it was quite exhilarating to

Silvester Langdale to see the avidity with which Baskerville tendered his services in the cause of the young barrister as a candidate for the representation of what we may consider his native city.

Fortune seemed to favour Silvester Langdale in everything. The vacancy in the representation could not have occurred at a more opportune time, for it was the time of the summer circuit just then; and when the intimation of the vacancy was conveyed to him, Silvester Langdale was in the assize courts of the city itself, and engaged, too, in a case which had agitated the city and county from one end to the other, and was likely to do so again. Silvester Langdale was engaged on the side that was the popular one; and as he carried the day in the cause against territorial wrong and oppression, his name almost imperceptibly became associated with a cry and with

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a principle. He therefore entered upon his canvass of the electors of the city of his youth under the most encouraging auspices. But although his chance was strong, and his claims good, it was not intended that he should assert those claims and try that chance without a struggle. True, it was known that he would have Lord Montalban's interest, and also that of the Duke of Chaumontel, who, in a moment of pardonable weakness, had allowed his personal predilections to get the better of his judgment, and had given a kind of tacit consent to the alliance of unknown and probably plebeian blood with one of his race. But still many of the powerful families of the county seemed to think that Silvester Langdale was forcing himself upon them in right of his great ability. That was a kind of claim that they could not recognize, seeing that the aspiring barrister

had no wealth, save that which he could himself personally acquire. The city had, for a century past, returned for one of its representatives a scion of some neighbouring noble house, until the election had become almost a matter of prescriptive right with them. But at the previous election, by some unaccountable chance, there was no eligible scion of a neighbouring noble house to be found, and consequently he could not be returned, and so a couple of members of the Smith and Robinson families, well known in the hosiery and pottery businesses, were returned without a struggle. The gentleman, however, who was connected with that branch of the commerce of the country which has to do with the supply of stockings to the community, found that the exigencies of his new position were such that, on the whole, perhaps he had better evade them by retirement, and

so he became a placeholder, and accepted the high and honourable post of steward of her Majesty's manor of Helpholm, wherever that royal appanage may be, and whatever may be the duties which its royal steward has to perform. The acceptance of this office by the representative of the hosiery interest of course necessitated that vacancy which Silvester Langdale was now seeking to fill. He was first in the field, but by no very lengthened start; for although the county families were still without a scion of a neighbouring noble house, they were ready to stand up for their order, and so they had determined upon nominating a young man who was the son of a Scotch peer, was in the army, had an allowance of three hundred a year from his father, was a great gambler with cards, lived at the rate of three thousand a year, and drank hard. It was not every day

that a candidate with these qualifications could be found, and surely they would more than counterbalance the claims of the young barrister on the score of ability, to say nothing of the influence of the county families. All the county families, with the exception of two or three, were tories of the old feudal stamp; "change nothing, improve nothing," was their implied cry, and they acted up to it. They inscribed upon their banners, in its beautiful mediæval orthography, the splendid aspiration which was worthy of them,—

"Lette laws and larning, trayde and commerce, dye,
But leve us still owr olde nobyl-i-tye."

And it was to uphold these glorious principles of the Constitution that the son of the Scotch Earl was brought down to contest the seat for Sabrinster with Silvester Langdale.

Sabrinster was a city that held by its

traditions, political, historical, and social. Its contested elections had, from time immemorial, been famous for the vast amount of money which they had caused to be expended. The oral traditions in connection with parliamentary elections, when it was necessary to keep open the poll for fourteen days, and when electors were brought from distant lands to exercise their franchise, were rich in startling facts. Old men in the city could tell you how, many years ago—"in the good old times, sir; ah, them was times, to be sure"—relatives of theirs were brought a distance of five hundred miles; how that when they started on their journeys—"and there was no railway then, sir; the old coaches, sir,—them was the conveyances for electors"—they were in a helpless state of intoxication, and remained so during the whole of their journey, and until after they had polled. Then there were legends

of how dead men had been miraculously raised from their graves in distant lands, appearing in their native city once again, and then vanishing to the realms of spirits suddenly. And these old men, garrulous, would boast and chuckle, as they did so, of how much their friends and relatives of their youth had cost aspiring candidates; of how young men of gentle birth would, in those days, spend their inheritance in the contest for the city; of how many hogsheads of strong beer were consumed in the fourteen days; of the heaps of sovereigns that were piled up on tables, which simple-minded electors might have for the asking; and how upon the chairing day the chair of state was torn to pieces, according to the good old custom, when the free and independent electors and non-electors shared the spoil between them. Oh! those were glorious days in that old cathedral city,

in which the county families held so much sway.

The scene is changed materially now. There was wide-spread corruption rampant for fourteen days then; there is the same corruption now, but then it is limited but to eight hours only.

Silvester Langdale had not been a candidate for the representation of the old city four-and-twenty hours before he was made acquainted with the fact that money must be spent in wide profusion, or his election could not be secured. Marl Baskerville was at his elbow, therefore the intimation did not trouble him. Marl Baskerville was his secret agent. Marl Baskerville had told him that he would raise five thousand pounds that afternoon, if necessary. The election must be carried, and in making this declaration Marl Baskerville appeared quite enthusiastic.

Silvester Langdale gained much know-

ledge during his canvass of the enlightened citizens of Sabrinster. He was made the recipient of many of their complaints, personal and political; and he was frequently reminded that he was one of them, "and now as he was rose in the world, he oughtn't to forget them old friends." Promises were held out to him upon conditions. Every elector, particularly amongst those who conducted shops, seemed to have extensive family connections who required to be provided for. There were not a few who took the opportunity which the canvass presented of receiving legal advice gratis upon matters in which the free and independent electors seeking it were involved. Amongst the shop-keepers, grievances of a personal character appeared to be very prevalent, and in more than one case Silvester Langdale was solicited to act as arbitrator immediately.

It was after a harassing day of canvass amongst this class, that Langdale was seated in his room at his hotel with Marl Baskerville, and while he was recounting some of these disagreeables, that a note was put into his hands, on reading which he burst into a loud laugh, saying, "Well, this is the richest of all; nothing has come up to this yet;" and he handed Marl Baskerville the following communication:—

"Sir,—Me and my eldest son has a vote apiece. We're in pardners as Hatters. But I've got a second son as has been educated special, and I should like to get him a nice snug berth under Guv'ment. As you will be sure to be returned if you do the liberal, I shall be glad to know if you will use your endeavour in the House of Commons to get my son the berth. He is not particular, so that he gets a

situation under Guv'ment, as all he requires is ease and emolument. Hoping to hear from you immediate, I remain honoured Sir, your most obedient,

"SIMON FELT AND SON,
"*Hatters, &c., Monk Street.*"

Marl Baskerville smiled as he read this letter, and in handing it back to Silvester Langdale he said, "You'll have plenty of those after you are elected; but they must be an overreaching lot to begin so early. It's simply asking you to enter upon open and wholesale bribery and corruption."

"What must I do about the two votes herein mentioned?" inquired Silvester Langdale, laughing.

"I'll call upon them and make it all right. Keep the letter, because it's a curiosity in its way."

"Oh, that I certainly will do," said

Silvester Langdale, placing the remarkable document in his pocket-book.

The contest was waged with much fury on both sides, and on the nomination day the old city was in a ferment of excitement, for the county families had put forth a battle cry, and had declared themselves ready to advance to the defence of the glorious Constitution in Church and State, which was much threatened by the appearance of such a candidate as Silvester Langdale. The popular feeling, however, was unmistakably with Langdale, who was received wherever he went with great demonstrations of applause by the crowds in the streets. And so was old Nicholas Darvill. It was indeed a proud day for the old man, that nomination day; and wherever he went he was overwhelmed with congratulations, for the old man's friends looked upon young Langdale as his son.

The hustings from which the nomination was to be made were erected at one end of the great Hall of the town-hall—a large, long chamber, with a stone floor, the walls of which were decorated with pieces of ancient armour, relics of those glorious times when civil war was raging through the land, and every household was in arms. This long and lofty chamber was, at an early hour of the morning, filled with a noisy crowd, who assembled together to exercise one of the most cherished privileges of Britons, and to enjoy a day's unmitigated uproar. Every citizen in that long Hall felt himself on this occasion a power in the State, especially those who were in possession of powerful lungs. The end of the Hall, against the hustings, was occupied mainly by the friends of the popular candidate, and they were densely packed together; and at the other end, where it was not so

crowded, and people could conveniently move about, knots of argumentative electors and citizens were congregated; and it would have amused, perhaps have instructed, both candidates if they could have heard the comments that were alternately made upon each of them. The Honourable Mr. M'Sandy, Silvester Langdale's opponent, being utterly unknown to the electors, obtained by far the greater share of animadversion and of assertion with regard to his personal matters. Of course he had his friends at that end of the Hall, and one of these, in answer to a disparaging remark, having reference to his being the younger son of a poor Scotch Earl, argued that "a younger son of a yarl of any sort was better nor a young laayer any day."

"Our man yan't a laayer!" cried one of Silvester Langdale's friends.

"A, yan't he? Wot is a then?" de-

manded the supporter of the Honourable Mr. M'Sandy.

"Why, a's a barrister, as everybody knows as knows anything at all," said Silvester Langdale's friend.

"Oh," cried the M'Sandyite, triumphantly, "there yain't much difference; it's six o' one and half a dozen o' t'other.—Wot do you say, Mr. Clinchett?" This was an appeal to a middle-aged gentleman who exhibited unmistakable evidence in his general appearance as to the nature of his calling—that of a shoemaker,—and who, being famous in the city on account of certain strong political opinions, which he was in the habit of enunciating, had obtained the sobriquet of the "political snob." This politician, being so pointedly appealed to by the M'Sandyite, said he must decline fettering himself by an expressed opinion until he had heard how Mr. Langdale could talk; and all round

the "political snob" held this to be a sound reticence, and he was greeted with a murmur of applause.

There is loud cheering outside in the main street of the old city, for the candidates, with their friends and committee-men, are approaching the hall. At first the roar is a distant roar, but it rapidly increases in volume as the two processions, one on either side of the street, approach the town-hall, which is now filled from end to end. In a few minutes the hustings are filled; the mayor, the two candidates, and their committee-men and friends having been admitted from the back, and everything is ready for the ceremony of the day; and that ceremony commenced; and as it was proceeded with, the imposing assembly exhibited all those exciting characteristics which are never absent on the nomination of candidates in a contested election, and with which every

elector, non-elector, householder, and rate-payer in every city and borough in the kingdom is well acquainted, having probably, at some time or other, taken a part in it. The mayor of the city—a little bald-headed man, wearing gold spectacles, a mulberry-coloured coat, and drab small-clothes—opened the proceedings amidst the usual uproar, upon which a stentorian voice, immediately under his worship, cried, in a tone that was heard down to the very end of the hall, "Hear the mar!" but the mayor had very little to say, and, in consequence of the uproar, the electors had nothing to hear from him. Silvester Langdale was then proposed as a fit and proper person, &c., by a gentleman with a very big and a very red face, and who was jocose in all he said, and put the crowd before him in good humour. He was seconded by a gentleman who was very fierce and determined, and who called

upon the electors to do their duty like men, and not as the nominees of a corrupt oligarchy. He believed they would do so; but if they didn't, then they were not worth that!—and he snapped his fingers emphatically in illustration of "that." The Honourable Mr. M'Sandy was proposed by one of the clergy from the cathedral; and he performed the duty with so much solemnity of voice and manner, that the gentleman below with the stentorian voice, losing all patience, cried out, "We don't want no sermon here; keep that for the shop!" which irreverent declaration was received with much applause in the body of the hall; and the reverend gentleman took the hint and proposed Mr. M'Sandy, who was seconded by a very fat man, who had something to do with the bishopric, but who announced that he was no speaker, and all he could say was that Mr. M'Sandy

had his head screwed on right and tight. "Which can't be said o' you, old Victuals-and-drink," again cried the stentor, in allusion, probably, to the extent of the eating and drinking powers of Mr. M'Sandy's seconder, who looked down at the rough gentleman who had made the personal allusion to him, and as he looked, breathed excessively hard and unpleasantly thick.

Silvester Langdale made a long and brilliant speech to the electors of that his native city, as he was proud to call it; and when he concluded there was a loud shout of "Bravo, Sabrinster!" in recognition of the fact that the city had produced such a man as Silvester Langdale. The Honourable Mr. M'Sandy was no orator, but he had a flowing moustache, was rather florid round the eyes and pale in the cheeks, as though he had been up rather late the previous night, as was

probably the fact. He addressed the electors as though they ought to think themselves devilish lucky in having such a candidate as himself, and the electors immediately afterwards gave him a practical answer by exhibiting an overwhelming majority of hands in favour of Silvester Langdale ; and a poll being demanded, the actual political fight commenced.

The excitement of the nomination was as nothing to that which was exhibited on the day of taking the poll. Every cab and carriage for hire in the city was employed without ceasing in racing up and down the streets. All the women in the back localities and in the alleys of the city seemed to have turned out in a body, and they all seemed actuated by a frantic desire to see Silvester Langdale returned. How fortune did seem to follow him ! And the working men got so excited that many of them appeared in the streets

without their coats and with their shirt sleeves tucked up, as though they were preparing for a pugilistic encounter. Tradesmen left their shops and quarrelled with each other in the roadway; little boys ran about with cards in their caps, on which were inscribed the names of the candidates; and when at two o'clock it was announced that the Honourable Mr. M'Sandy, finding he had no chance, had resigned, a little army of men and boys, with brooms of all sorts and sizes in their hands, turned out and swept the street from end to end, in search, as they announced, of the fugitive candidate.

Silvester Langdale was now member for the old city, and a leading man in it, —courted, and caressed, and invited on all sides; but with his great triumph fresh upon him, the happiest hour that he spent upon that day so great to him was in the quiet evening, late, when he and Marl

Baskerville visited old Nicholas Darvill in his brick-floored parlour, and smoked their pipes. For it was the old man's custom of an evening late to smoke his pipe. It was a happy hour indeed both to that old man and Silvester Langdale.

CHAPTER IV.

A PLEASANT EVENING IN NICHOLAS DARVILL'S OLD HOUSE—MARL BASKERVILLE TACITURN, BUT VERY OBSERVANT.

The room which served old Nicholas Darvill for a parlour, had originally been the chief kitchen of the old house in which he lived. Its fire-place was nearly as extensive as the other portion of the apartment, for it stretched across the entire of one side of the room, and had the appearance of a great porch rather than of a fire-place. It was built when people really sat in chimney corners, and the friends of Nicholas Darvill when they visit him sit in that huge chimney corner.

But even in these modern days of ours, why to look at that old chimney, even in the summer time, when no yule log is burning, and no ashes of a cheering fire are left upon the hearth might make the most stolid light up his mind with a fanciful creation. Yes, to look at that great chimney place makes one imaginative and carries one back to the days of the wassail bowl and baronial hospitality and revels, to those days when we are told that beards wagged all, whatever that performance or operation may have been; and we may fancy what this old place in which we now stand was in those times of revelry, of feudal splendour, and kingly tyranny.

Why may we not picture to ourselves an ancient hall of an old building, whose roof is an intricate mass of rafters and old beams. At one end of the old hall is a huge fire-place like that which we now

contemplate, which, in its appearance, might be the entrance to a cave, but that on the floor there blazes a mighty log, which roars in its flames and throws out a golden light that illuminates every corner of that old hall. On each side of that vast fire-place we see seated upon benches, comfortably backed, old familiar faces—faces that are historical, beaming with satisfaction and delight.

It is Christmas Eve. Around that old apartment are hung branches of the holly, and in the middle, hanging from the ceiling, swings a mighty mass of mistletoe, which shall see some glorious fun below ere long. The wassail bowl that has been filled is a wassail bowl indeed. It might have satisfied the grim Earl, who, in name at all events, if not in appearance, was a Guy.

And who are they that in this picture, born of the imagination, we see around

this extensive hearth in that old hall? As we have said, they all have old familiar historic faces, and the crowd thereof are clothed in gorgeous array, in the fashions that came into brilliant vogue with the Restoration, which flung away the Puritan's hat and sombre gabardine, to be restored as it would seem, or something like it, in this the age in which we ourselves are living. Oh, yes, the cavaliers held revelry in that old city at Christmas time, and especially in that old house, as many civic records tell, in which old Nicholas Darvill has his home now, and in which our hero passed his youth. Oh yes! Christmas was in those days a time of revelry indeed in that old city: and so it has been ever since, and is so still. There are not the gay cavaliers, at least they are not now attired as gay cavaliers as we have just in our imagination seen them; but in that old city

the Christmas time is as jolly as ever, and the holly and the misletoe are as green and as much reverenced, and the yule log sparkles with as many golden scintillations, which the imagination may shape into forms fantastical and shadowy, as in years gone by, when chimney corners held their dozen occupants, and baronial halls were filled with wassail-quaffing retainers.

Although Christmas Day, in all that country round about that old city—out upon the broad expanse of heath and down, banked or bounded by those everlasting hills yonder, that seem to roll their blue volumes to the skies, may not be what it was in those ages past, whose records carry us to the revelries of the Merry Monarch, yet is Christmas in its revelry and good cheer in the country all around that old city, and all around our old cities generally, what it has ever

been; and round about the blazing fire upon the farmstead hearth assemble neighbours, welcomed there to eat, drink, and be merry all the long night through.

It was the summer time when Silvester Langdale was elected as a fit and proper person to represent the old city in Parliament, and so there was no fire burning on the hearth in the great yawning fire-place of old Nicholas Darvill's parlour, but it was not the less cheery for all that. The great square bricks of the floor were glaringly red, and were as smooth as the polished oak of a Parisian floor, and they looked quite glittering in the flare of the gas above; for there was gas now in that old chamber, and it was lighted, as the summer evening had closed in. It was impossible that Silvester Langdale and his trusty friend could get away from his election friends before the dusk; but as soon as the shades of evening had closed

in he tore himself away, and enjoyed the honest pride that swelled his heart in standing in that old, well-remembered chamber.

But proud as Silvester Langdale felt when he stood there, his feeling of satisfaction probably did not equal that of the old schoolmaster, when he received his guests. Why, old Darvill could have hugged his former pupil usher.

"Ah, sir," he said to Marl Baskerville, after he had jeopardized Silvester Langdale's shoulder in the energy with which, with all his strength, he had shaken hands with him in the old chamber, "Ah, sir, you do not remember him as I do."

He seemed to think it was necessary to say something of this sort, as a kind of apology to Marl Baskerville, for the demonstrative enthusiasm which the old man had exhibited.

"Say not so," said Marl Baskerville, "for next to yourself, perhaps, I know more of his history than anybody. Eh, Langdale?"

"The great friend of whom you have often heard me speak," said Silvester Langdale to Nicholas Darvill.

Why, the old man seemed determined to try and wring off the arm of Marl Baskerville now.

"Oh, sir," he cried in a tone that might have led to the inference that he was in doubt whether to laugh or cry, and indeed perhaps the lightest touch would have turned the balance one way or the other, "Oh, Sir, you are my best friend."

"Eh!" said Marl Baskerville in a tone of merry surprise, for he had never seen the old man before.

"Yes, you are my best friend," continued the old man, in answer to the look

of surprise from Marl Baskerville, "because you have been the best friend of my dear boy here."

Marl Baskerville, the best friend of Silvester Langdale! Well, was it not better that the old man should be in ignorance of the relations which subsisted between the now eminent barrister and the man who had been designated as Silvester Langdale's best friend. It was, for if the good old man had known it, the knowledge would have made his present happiness a misery, and turned the brightness of his present contemplation to almost unutterable anguish.

And presently they were very jovial at that round table in the old room of Nicholas Darvill's house. Small though the party were, it was a pleasant gathering, truly.

"Here you are again, in the old room, Silvester, dear boy," says Nicholas Darvill,

cheerily. "And now that I look at you seated there in the old spot that we both know so well, I can scarcely realize the fact that you are the member of parliament for the good old city. Well, my boy, it is an honour that our great county families for centuries, I might say, have claimed as exclusively their own."

"But you know, sir," says Marl Baskerville, "that our young friend here may be said to be connected with the great county families himself, or at all events I suppose he will be"—and here he cast a meaning glance at Silvester Langdale.

Nicholas Darvill opened his twinkling eyes with astonishment at this intimation, and said—

"Silvester connected with the great county families! How do you mean, sir?"

"You surely are not ignorant of his intimacy with Lord Montalban?"

"Oh, you mean that he has been introduced into the society of the great people. Oh yes, I know that, and proud I am of it; but that is not what I meant. I meant that the representation of our old city has hitherto been held as a kind of right by some member of a county family."

"Exactly; and again I say that our young friend, although he is not at this moment a member of a county family, probably will be one of these early days," said Marl Baskerville.

Silvester Langdale is amused by the expression of perplexity that is on the old man's countenance.

"You are speaking to me in a riddle, sir," said Nicholas Darvill.

"It is one that is easily solved," replied Marl Baskerville. "Solve it for our friend, Langdale."

Silvester Langdale laughed, and said

that Baskerville was jumping at conclusions.

"Do you not know, sir, that Lord Montalban has a daughter?" Marl Baskerville inquired of Nicholas Darvill.

Yes, oh yes, he knew that.

"Very well, then, if that daughter becomes the Honourable Mrs. Langdale, I presume that our young friend here will then be a member of one of the county families. My riddle, you see, as I said, is easily solved."

"Why, Silvester," cried Nicholas Darvill, his glorious old face glowing with proud satisfaction, "is it as this gentleman says?" and without waiting for the confirmation he continued, "My boy, you are worthy of her."

"By-the-by, Mr. Darvill," said Marl Baskerville, "I presume you know something of the history of the Montalban family?"

"I think I do, sir," replied Nicholas

Darvill; "it is one of the most ancient families in the county; indeed, I should say it is the most ancient, as they can trace their descent from that wondrous origin, the Conquest. I recollect the present man's father well. Ah, sir, the family was in a different position then in the county from what it is now."

"Indeed! How, and in what respect?"

"They were then the most wealthy—they are now I believe anything but that."

"I have heard that the present holder of the title has squandered his inheritance," said Marl Baskerville, inquiringly.

"And you have been rightly informed; it has melted away in his hands until he has but one small estate left."

Why, Marl Baskerville knew this a great deal better than Nicholas Darvill did, and yet he assumed to be ignorant

upon the subject, and out of mere curiosity said—

"And that I suppose he can't dispose of?"

"I believe such is the fact," replied Nicholas Darvill, and then turning to Silvester Langdale, he said, "Do you know, Silvester, my boy, that I have lately heard all sorts of romantic tales about that same estate, people talk very openly about it in the city here."

Marl Baskerville is listening eagerly to this, and yet he does not exhibit any outward sign of special interest.

"I remember that the good folks down here were always fond of romantic tales," replied Silvester Langdale, "I am sure the tales that I have listened to in this very room would supply a romance writer with volumes of materials."

"Yes, I know that well enough; but still I think there is much of fact in this

romantic story that is whispered about concerning the Montalban property," said the old man.

"Concerning the property," exclaimed Silvester Langdale.

Neither he nor the old man noticed that Marl Baskerville was now indeed an eager listener.

"Well, they say it may affect the property, but, to tell you the truth, if you were to require it of me I should be but a sorry narrator of what is even the nature of the romantic tales that I allude to as being afloat in this old city."

"How is it that we have heard nothing about the matter up in London?" said Silvester Langdale.

"Why because such idle gossip would be lost in the great vortex of that social maelstrom. For of course it is idle gossip. Why, there is not a great house in our county here that has not its legend

created years ago by the people who live around. One great mansion, according to the legendary gossip of the neighbourhood, has its skeletons buried beneath the flag-stones of its portico; and of course the legend is, that the skeletons are those of murdered people who inconveniently stood in the way of the designs and plans of some ancient feudal lord of that particular soil. Then another great mansion, according to the same reliable authority, has its walled-up chamber, in which beautiful women were in ages past immured after the fashion, I suppose, that was adopted by the great Bluebeard. Why, even the glorious fane that is the beauty of our city has its tragic legends too—connected, many of them, with the great houses round about."

"All that I know well enough," said Silvester Langdale, "but you said that the people in the city here were talking

openly upon matters that might affect the property of Lord Montalban in his estate. What is it that they have said, and how is it that they are saying it just now?"

"Why they are saying it just now I don't know; but what they have been saying will be said more widely now, seeing that you have been elected for the city, and that you were supported by the influence of the Chaumontels and the Montalbans," the old man observed.

"But what is it that they have said?" inquired Silvester Langdale, in a tone that plainly indicated that he put the question out of mere curiosity.

"Well, you see, Silvester, the estate which Lord Montalban now lives upon is the only one of what were once the great possessions of the family that he did not inherit. All those that came through a

long line of ancestors down by inheritance have passed away and been distributed to other holders long ago. But this one remnant of a great estate was a simple purchase by the trustees."

"Yes, a very matter-of-fact affair, and I cannot conceive how the lively imaginations of the good citizens here can weave around such a structure the materials of romantic gossip," said Silvester Langdale to the old man.

"Oh! but they do, nevertheless," Nicholas Darvill said, quite solemnly.

"Does the romantic gossip point to any practical matter?" Silvester Langdale inquired.

"It does."

"And what is that?"

"Why, it is said that the trustees of Lord Montalban must have made some great mistake when they effected the purchase of the estate, and then the

people shake their heads and mysteriously hint that something will turn up one of these days that will astonish people. You know the usual country gossip form."

And the old man puffed out the smoke from his pipe quite dreamily, as though the influence of the romantic gossip they were referring to was strong upon him.

"I see," said Silvester Langdale, "the old melodrama of the lord in wrongful possession, and the son of the bad nobleman's elder brother turning up from the earth or dropping down from the clouds suddenly some fine morning to the discomfiture and the ousting of the bad nobleman."

All three were evidently amused by this illustration.

"I don't think it is that sort of thing, because you see Lord Montalban never had any elder brother, or any brother at all; therefore he could scarcely have any

fears of the possibility of an elder brother's son suddenly turning up from the localities you have mentioned, Silvester."

"This was a purchased and not an inherited estate of Lord Montalban's?" said Silvester Langdale, inquiringly.

"Yes, purchased on his behalf by the trustees to whose guardianship he was left."

"And how long has he been in possession?"

"How long, why, let me see—how old are you, Silvester? Why, you are going on for five-and-twenty. Yes; six from five-and-twenty would be nineteen. Why, it must be nearly twenty years ago since he first came into possession."

"Nearly twenty—not more than twenty, then?" said Silvester Langdale.

"Oh no, it is not more than twenty, because I have reason for remembering

that you were just six years old at the time," the old man replied.

"Rather odd that these rumours and this gossiping came into life after such a time, and at such a time, is it not?" said Silvester Langdale to Marl Baskerville.

"It is rather strange," replied that mysterious personage, in a tone of musing.

As we have already said, he had listened most intently to the short conversation that had passed between Nicholas Darvill and the young barrister.

"Do you think it is at all worth inquiring into?" Silvester Langdale inquired of Marl Baskerville.

"I don't indeed!" he instantly replied. "Why, as Mr. Darvill observed, every house in the county has its legend, and if the friends of every family in the county were to set about instituting inquiries as

to the origin of any gossip that might be got up in connexion with family history, where would they begin? and, what is still more pertinent and important, where would they ever possibly end?"

Silvester Langdale laughed, and said that was true enough.

"Mr. Darvill was quite right when he said that these idle rumours were worthless, and ought not to be listened to," said Marl Baskerville.

Nicholas Darvill thought to himself, "Did I say that, well, I am sure, I don't recollect it, but, I suppose, I ought to have said it."

And so the subject was dismissed, and the three friends entered upon other topics, and spent a right pleasant evening round that homely table in that ancient parlour.

The conversation that we have recorded did not, however, pass so readily from the

mind of Marl Baskerville as it did from Silvester Langdale. Oh no, he treasured every word of it, and before he retired to rest that night he made record of certain facts which will, probably, ere long be found to have had an important bearing upon the fabric of this history.

CHAPTER V.

SILVESTER LANGDALE TAKES THE OATHS AND HIS SEAT.

SILVESTER LANGDALE has gone through the ceremony which is designated taking the oaths and his seat,—that is, a person in a barrister's wig and gown has mumbled something to him at the side of the table in the House of Commons; he has kissed a book, and shaken hands with the Speaker. That is the form and ceremony of taking the oaths and a seat in the House of Commons. It is astonishing what a lot of swearing goes on in the House of Commons. It is supposed to be an assembly of gentlemen and men of honour. They are all held to be honour-

able members; but the country or the State considers that there is not one of them, from the Speaker down to the member of the tenderest years, whose word can be depended upon for anything. Every member is supposed to take a solemn oath that he is not and does not intend to become a traitor and a conspirator; that he will faithfully perform his duties, and that he will not burglariously break open the first church he comes to; and he has to swear these things upon the true faith of a Christian. Of course there is but one inference to be drawn from the established form, and that is, that if the oath were not taken, the member would at once set about to plot treason and become a conspirator—a kind of modern Guy Fawkes; that he would shirk his work, and occupy himself in sacrilegous burglary.

Everything has to be done upon oath.

After a member has taken the oaths and his seat, if the validity of his return be questioned, a committee of five is appointed to try the question, and then the five members all set to swearing again, and call down everlasting vengeance—or appear to do so—upon themselves if by word or deed they should show the slightest partiality to the parties interested; it being assumed, we suppose, that if they did not so pledge themselves they would sell their influence and decision to the highest bidder, it being well known, of course, that all English gentlemen do that sort of thing when they are unfettered by what is supposed to be the obligations of an oath. And not only do the members of an election committee take a solemn oath that they will not degrade themselves to the level of criminals, but the very shorthand writer who is appointed to take notes of the proceedings has to take a

similar oath that he will not garble the evidence, and that he will be a faithful reporter of what takes place.

So with our judges. Their minds are naturally so inclined to wickedness and corruption, that they cannot be trusted with the administration of justice until they have solemnly sworn that they will not attempt to dethrone the Queen, and that they will in all cases do the thing that is right.

And the bishops, we must perforce assume that they would, from the archbishop down to the right reverend prelate who goes to Kamtschatka, at once set about embezzling the surplus revenues of their several sees, and doing other things equally unbecoming in a gentleman and a bishop, if the country had not the security of the oath which the bishop on the occasion of his consecration is obliged to take.

Then, again, how could we expect to retain that legal acumen, that forensic eloquence, that impartiality and justice, which the Lord Mayor, the aldermen, and the great body of the unpaid magistracy of the country are born with, if it were not for the oath which the Constitution requires them to take when they become blossoming blessings to their grateful country?

Still there is this disagreeable assumption, that as in all these cases a solemn oath is required, if the custom of swearing were abolished amongst us, of course all our great and good men would at once lapse into wickedness, and the last state of the country would be a great deal worse than the first, when our ancestors used paint instead of broadcloth.

Silvester Langdale has given security for honesty as a Member of Parliament by taking the prescribed oaths, and having

taken his seat on the second row behind the treasury bench, he is visited by the smirking whipper-in of the Government, who, taking his seat beside the new member, congratulates him upon his return, and expresses the assurance he feels that the new member will worthily support those principles which have become traditionary in the family with which the whipper-in understands the new member is about to become matrimonially connected. The whipper-in also delicately hints that there is a lack of legal ability on their side of the House—that is, amongst the older members; and hence he has more than ordinary satisfaction in welcoming the new member in his new sphere.

But the whipper-in attached to the Government is not the only member who takes a lively interest in the appearance in the House of the new member. Sil-

vester Langdale, although such a very young man, is well known by reputation to all the members of that assembly. His name was famous before the election for Sabrinster, and those who had never seen him before stared at him as though he were a phenomenon. The feeling of curiosity in Members of Parliament inside their own house is very marked. When a high and mighty notability visits the gallery that is set apart for the especial accommodation of such personages, it is quite funny to see the simple and primitive manner in which the members will go up to the side galleries in order to stare at the illustrious visitors, just as though they had been placed there for no other purpose than their inspection. Nobody except Silvester Langdale himself, therefore, thought anything of a member going across the floor of the House, staring at the new member, and then

going back to make his private comments to his neighbours upon the appearance of the young member.

There is no doubt, however, that the House generally felt considerable interest in the advent of Silvester Langdale to legislative honours. Did he not come under peculiarly bright auspices? He had attained to a brilliant celebrity at the bar almost on the instant, and the newspapers throughout the country had within the last few days proclaimed to the world that he was about "to lead to the hymeneal altar" the only daughter of Viscount Montalban. The bridegroom in all marriages in high life leads his bride to the hymeneal altar, at least according to the authorized announcement of the fact, as though the marriage ceremony were a figure in a quadrille, and the parties advanced and set to partners.

Yes, Silvester Langdale did make his

appearance in the House of Commons, and commenced his legislative career, under very bright auspices indeed, but he had no immediate opportunity of displaying his oratorical powers in the House, seeing that his election had taken place almost on the eve of the prorogation. He had taken his seat in the very last week of the session, and the first ceremonial in the House that he had to witness after taking the usual oaths was the rather uninteresting form of prorogation, denuded of its chief attractions.

The ceremony of prorogation by Commission is anything but an exhilarating or an impressive one. At the appointed hour five figures in scarlet robes, and wearing three-cornered hats, are observed entering the House of Lords in Indian file, by the door at the side of the throne, and they take their seats on a kind of form, which, at a distance, looks so ex-

tremely narrow that one almost feels nervous lest the august quintette should topple backwards, an incident which of course is not provided for in the Commission for giving the royal assent. The five having solemnly taken their seats, an officer who is called the Usher of the Black Rod, who carries his hat in one hand, and a short baton, which he holds in the centre, in the other, advances to the front of the senators in crimson, and appears to stare at them intently, holding out the baton at arm's-length in a somewhat threatening attitude. Having satisfied himself as to the character of the countenances of the high and mighty personages before him, and the Lord Chancellor having apparently fully returned the stare of inspection, the keeper of the Queen's conscience, the Lord Chancellor aforesaid, addresses the erect individual with the baton, and tells him to

proceed at once to the House of Commons, and inform that honourable House that the Lords Commissioners desire their attendance in the House of Peers to hear a document in which they are interested read to them. The individual with the baton bends low with a remarkably stiff obeisance, and then turns and stalks out of the House. The scene then becomes almost embarrassingly ludicrous. The five noble peers on the long form sit like stars from Madame Tussaud's, gazing intently upon the gallery at the other end of the House. They sit motionless as images, and in the distance they do not appear to breathe. Of course this sort of thing impresses all present with a kind of awe, and the ladies in the gallery speak in subdued whispers, and we have no doubt that some of them wonder how long the gentlemen in the scarlet robes are going to sit silently there. The time

they do sit there doing nothing seems much longer than it really is, and some people would get nervous under the infliction.

Lest it should have this effect upon us, we will follow the Black Rod to the Commons. He stalks majestically down the long corridors between the two Houses, still holding his short baton out before him, and an avenue through the congregation of strangers is made for him as he approaches the door of the House of Commons, the door-keeper of which has been expecting him, and watching for him. The moment this respected guardian catches sight of the gentleman in black approaching, he slams the door to, almost in his face, which, however, the gentleman with the baton does not appear to take at all as an indignity, for he advances to the door and gives three knocks at it with his baton. It is imme-

diately opened by the Serjeant-at-Arms, who, with a well-feigned show of surprise, and with that polished hypocrisy which nothing but long practice in the forms of our Legislature can give, seems blandly to say, "Dear me, who'd have thought of seeing you? pray walk in." Black Rod, however, is unbending in his dignity, and he takes no more notice of the Serjeant-at-Arms than he does of the door-post, but stalks majestically in and up the centre of the House, bowing with great ceremony and solemnity three times as he does so. Arrived at the table of the House in front of the Speaker, he plants the end of his baton firmly in front of the mace that is lying before him, and delivers his message to Mr. Speaker, retiring backwards to the door, and making three more obeisances as he does so. It requires a practised hand, or rather we should say practised foot, to perform this

feat of walking backwards, because the slightest *faux pas* would bring the person down with unpleasant force, and in a ludicrous position. Such an incident has occurred in the present Houses of Parliament, and in the presence of the Queen herself. There is no fear, however, that this will occur to Sir Augustus Clifford, who is the usher of the black rod, for he seems to tread as firmly walking backwards as he does in the usual mode of human locomotion. Well, the Black Rod having reached the door backwards, the Speaker gathers up his robes and walks down the House after Black Rod, and with the members of both sides trooping after him, and they go with a rush to the bar of the House of Lords.

The Commissioners having taken off their hats and put them on again, the Lord Chancellor informs the Commons that he, and the other individuals on

either side of him—it is impossible to say who they are, the scarlet robes and the three-cornered hats are such effectual disguises that their own spouses would not recognise the wearers at any distance—have been appointed by Commission to give the royal assent to certain bills, and he directs the clerk at the table to read the Commission, so that there may be no mistake or imposition in the matter. The clerk accordingly spreads what appears to be a large parchment title-deed on the table, with an enormous seal attached, a seal as big as a soup plate. Having read the Commission, the clerk, who is called the reading clerk, stations himself at one side of the table, and the chief clerk on the other. The reading clerk then reads *seriatim*, the titles of the several bills that are to receive the royal assent, and as he does so the two clerks bend low to the five scarlet robes, and the

chief clerk turns with an indignant gesture to the Commons at the bar, and exclaims, if the bill be a public one, *La Reine le veut;* if it be a private one, *Sois fait comme il est desiré.* The list of bills having thus been gone through, the Lord Chancellor reads the Queen's speech in a clear, and occasionally emphatic tone, and then tells the Commons in polite terms that they may go about their business, upon which the Commons troop back to their House, and the Speaker takes his seat, not in his chair, but at the table, and he informs the members present who cluster round the table of that with which they are all perfectly well acquainted; namely, that he has just been to the House of Lords to hear a speech from the Queen, and he will tell them all about it. As, however, he is not a very expert reporter, in order to ensure accuracy, he has, by a little manœuvring, obtained a

copy, which he will read to them. He then draws from his pocket a copy of the speech, which the cunning old fox had received before he went to the House of Lords, and he reads it all over again to the members.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MARRIAGE OF AUGUSTA MONTALBAN.

Augusta Montalban has ceased to institute comparisons between the Marquis of Milltown and Silvester Langdale. The daughter of Viscount Montalban has by almost imperceptible degrees given her heart and soul to the young barrister, and she would willingly go into abject poverty with him if fate were to decree the sacrifice. And Silvester Langdale would lay down his life for her; and yet it is an ill-advised marriage. The union will be one of pure affection; but the world, if it knew all the circumstances by which it was to be accompanied, would hold it to be indiscreet, and perhaps a false step.

And there is no doubt, considering all the circumstances, that the union was not a worldly-wise one. Viscount Montalban was no longer wealthy. It is true he could not alienate his sole remaining estate, nor could he encumber it; but he could anticipate his income, and he did so, but the means thereof were gradually becoming more circumscribed and difficult every year.

Augusta Montalban was a portionless daughter, but she had been nursed in the lap of luxury, and her will had never been thwarted. She was true-hearted, high-minded, generous, noble; but she was lavish in the gratification of her predilections. She was therefore likely to be a dangerous wife to Silvester Langdale, because his income of course would be fluctuating, or at all events unknown, although it was certain to be large; but being unknown, it would not be duly con-

sidered by Augusta Montalban as the wife of Silvester Langdale. But the marriage was a doubly hazardous step when we consider that Silvester Langdale, like Lord Montalban, had already learnt the means and availed himself of them of anticipating his income. He was indeed a man in chains as well as Viscount Montalban, and if the world had known the fact, it would with reason have given an unfavourable forecast of the destiny of the young and ardent couple. It would not have been slow to prophesy disaster as the inevitable result of such a union, and there would have appeared to be wisdom in the forecast. But nobody can look into the future, and the future cannot be disclosed through the agency of the present, although it may perhaps sometimes be mirrored in the past. If such sombre reasoning had been whispered to Silvester Langdale he would have

laughed at it. He would have argued—if not openly, at all events to himself—that he had not been born rich, but he had been born lucky. He would have faith thenceforth in the old adage—its truth would be indisputable. The idea that his marriage with Augusta Montalban could possibly lead to disaster would have been ridiculed by him as being something more than preposterous. It would be impossible.

The day for the marriage of Augusta Montalban and Silvester Langdale has been fixed, the wedding dresses have been nearly completed, and the trousseau has been inspected. A bishop is to officiate, assisted by a dean and a vicar. What is it that clergymen who "assist" a superior at a marriage have to do? The church is to be St. George's, Hanover Square, and it has been arranged, in order to give additional *éclat* to the occasion, that the

wedding breakfast shall be held at the mansion of the Duke of Chaumontel.

At first Miss Montalban protested against this proposal, because the Marquis of Milltown had become almost odious in her eyes; and now his name was for ever and everywhere associated with that of the brilliant horsewoman who had been the cause of the *contretemps* at the hunt down in the country. But gradually Miss Montalban had been reasoned out of her objection by her father, who had argued with her that a more brilliant honour could scarcely have been conferred upon Silvester Langdale than to be invited to hold his wedding feast in the ancestral home of the Chaumontels. It was this argument that had decided Augusta Montalban. The course proposed was to be in honour of her own dear love;—oh, no, no, no; she could not hesitate after that. But what would she have said,

how would her cheek have crimsoned and her bosom heaved with passion, if the information had been conveyed to her, that when it was known—for it was made known through the usual channels—that the wedding breakfast was to be held at the Duke of Chaumontel's, bets were offered in the clubs to which the Marquis of Milltown belonged, that the noble Marquis would introduce Marie Wingrave as one of the guests at the wedding breakfast? It would have made no difference in her feelings to have known that such bets were not actually made, but they were merely offered as indicating the feeling the associates of the Marquis of Milltown entertained with regard to that young nobleman's sensibilities, and the position in which he then stood. Happily for her peace of mind, Augusta Montalban had no intimation of these things; and she was enabled to contemplate her hap-

piness, and to anticipate it in all its own native brightness, without the shadow of an indication of any approaching cloud.

And Silvester Langdale, was he not happy too? and there is somebody with him whose happiness may be described as ecstatic. Nicholas Darvill has come up from the old city to be present at the ceremony, and Nicholas Darvill has been introduced to Augusta Montalban, and that young lady has fondly embraced the old man; for has she not many a time indeed with greedy ear devoured the discourse of Silvester Langdale when he has been recounting to her the story of his youth?

Why, nothing could in appearance be more auspicious and bright than was the advent of the marriage of Augusta Montalban and Silvester Langdale. If there was anything approaching to a shadow near it, perhaps it was in the person of

Marl Baskerville; but then, if that were a shadow, it was perceptible only to Silvester Langdale himself, and scarcely so to him. The person of Marl Baskerville might have been as a shadow in the eyes of Viscount Montalban too, if he had seen it—but he never had—in connexion with the approaching marriage. Marl Baskerville has, however, been a studious observer of what has been going on, for in his hands is placed the regulation and the application of those chains that are loosely and yet bindingly hanging all round Silvester Langdale. He has talked to the young barrister—now the well-known Member of Parliament—on the subject of the marriage, and his eyes have exhibited that maniacal glare to which we have previously alluded. But that glare has never been seen in its intensity yet; it has hitherto been but concealed, while at the same time it has

indicated the fury that was slumbering beneath.

The sun is shining brightly on the wedding morning, and there is a crowd in the street in front of St. George's Church, Hanover Square, to see the bridal party in the great wedding arrive. And everybody in that crowd, young girls and old women, wrinkled men and beardless youths, are unanimous in their opinion that a handsomer, finer, nobler looking couple never were made one by God's holy ordinance; and a buzz of glowing admiration swells up from that crowd pressing round the gates as Silvester Langdale leads his newly-made bride down the steps of the church porch and hands her into the carriage. And in the countenance of that handsome bride there is a glow of happy pride and unmingled joy. Beauty and happiness sit commingled on that noble face as the delighted

bridegroom presses the lovely hand that, beneath the blessing of the Church, has just given him a heart entire. And as they drive away, instinctively as it were there rises from the crowd a murmur, which, if it could be analyzed, might perhaps be found to contain the elements that form a blessing.

The neighbourhood of Chaumontel House is alive with excitement. It can be discovered peeping out of upper windows, for all the houses on either side of the street appear to be holding communication upon the subject of the grand wedding of that morning. The housemaid's work in every household in that street has not only been delayed, but neglected; for it is not often that there is such a brilliant marriage to be seen almost next door, as it were, to every house in the street.

Chaumontel House is a palace. It is

of vast extent, and it is the very realization of the magnificence of great wealth. Its portico is massive, and presents much architectural beauty in its design, and the entrance-hall is all of marble, and this hall extends the whole depth of the house, and is surmounted by a cupola of ornamental glass. Opposite to the entrance is a noble flight of marble stairs, which leads to a gallery round the three sides of the splendid hall, and from which the several chambers of the mansion branch. It is a mansion that upon occasions can accommodate a thousand guests, but there are not a thousand guests to-day. The *élite* of the great world is there, not so much in honour of Augusta Montalban's wedding—because, truth to say, they do not approve it—as because the wedding feast is being celebrated in the house of the Duke of Chaumontel.

And it is manifest that the noble

Duke has got over his original prejudice against the union of the Chaumontel blood with not only that of very inferior veins, but of absolutely that which is unknown. We say that he has manifestly surmounted this original prejudice, because he is to-day, on the morning of the wedding, beaming in his bearing to all around. Indeed, if Augusta Montalban had been that morning married to a lineal descendant of the greatest Saxon or Norman thief of those days when theft was the highest attribute of nobility, he could not have been more beaming or more light-hearted. And his duchess, who was ten years younger than himself, and was splendidly full-blown, and whose genealogical line could be traced back nominally to the flood of vagabondage that overran the nation when King Stephen refused to remunerate his breeches-maker with more than half a

crown,—she was beaming too, and, as the fashionable chronicler of the wedding intends to say when he writes his account to-night, "looks every inch a duchess;" which, if weight, and size, and dazzling ornaments, and an expansive display of rolling bosom constitute the great points of a duchess, will be unquestionably perfectly true.

Oh yes, the Duke and Duchess of Chaumontel feel that that is a great occasion. They have reasoned themselves out of their fears with regard to this alliance; and they feel that perhaps, after all, it is not so very objectionable that some portion of the family—and that a failing portion, you know—should ally itself to what was called genius and ability, and that sort of thing. It was not, perhaps, what they could tolerate in any very near connexion of their own; that of course would be out of the ques-

tion; but Augusta Montalban did not bear even the name of the Chaumontels, and she was at least a couple of degrees removed. So that altogether, taking all the circumstances into due consideration, the alliance of that day might be accepted as an auspicious one.

Of course the wedding of Lord Montalban's daughter had excited great interest at the clubs, as well as in society generally; but those at the clubs to whom reference has previously been made, who were ready to offer bets that the Marquis of Milltown would introduce Marie Wingrave to the wedding breakfast, would have lost their wagers if they had made them; for not only did the brilliant Marquis not attempt to introduce that young lady, but he did not introduce himself. Of course during the wedding breakfast this excited no surprise amongst the guests—it would indeed require some-

thing very sensational to rouse them to surprise,—because they knew that Miss Montalban might have married the Marquis if she had pleased; but as she did not please, but had married somebody else, why, it was very good taste on the part of the Marquis to absent himself from the wedding festivities that were then being celebrated. The guests, therefore, were not at all surprised at the absence of the noble Marquis, but the noble Marquis's noble parents were, for they had fully expected that he would have been present. He was, however, absent, and his absence may be explained by a conversation which took place between the Duke of Chaumontel and Viscount Montalban after the usual formula of a wedding breakfast had been gone through, and the bride had retired for the purpose of preparing for the tour which leads to the honeymoon.

A letter had been placed in the hands of the Duke, and it was observed that when he read it, he looked as though the contents had much amused him; and so indeed they had, for he beckoned Lord Montalban over to one of the windows, in the recess of which he said, taking Lord Montalban by the button,—

"I told you how it would be, Montalban. I said if we did not manage for Constantine to marry Augusta, that Marie Wingrave would inevitably marry him, and now look at this."

And he handed the letter he had just received to Lord Montalban, laughing as he did so, as though it contained a very good joke.

The letter was very brief: it was dated "Paris"—was signed "Milltown," and announced that, as it was impossible he could have Augusta Montalban, and as he felt he could not live without her, the

next best thing was to look out for somebody exactly like her, and that somebody he had found in Marie Wingrave, who was now the Marchioness of Milltown.

"Nice joke that, isn't it?" said the Duke of Chaumontel, shrugging his shoulders, and laughing.

Lord Montalban, however, did not laugh.

Speed away, Silvester Langdale, with your happy, beautiful bride. You are both in all the sublimity of bliss now. You are flying onward, and heaven upon earth seems opening round you. Cherish her, Silvester Langdale; cherish him, Augusta; ye are both worthy of each other. Onward—onward to the heaven that is before you. Good-bye,—farewell, —your path is lined with flowers. Farewell! we shall meet you in the days to come.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW TENOR AT THE OPERA.

Severn Barnes remained two years and a half in Italy, and during that time he practised assiduously;—his professors called it study, but it was practice, although perhaps between the two terms there is a distinction, but no difference. He has practised with great ardour, and at the end of the time for his remaining in the boot of Europe, his master professor, under whose instructions he had from the commencement been, said to him—

"Now then, you can return to your own country, and carry with you the finest tenor of the day; and when you

get to London tell them that I said so. Prove to them that what I say is true, and you have only to open your mouth to do so, and your fortune is made."

Severn Barnes was of course highly elated at this, as he would naturally be, and he expressed his gratification to his professor, who in return said—

"But mind, you must be careful, you know. I believe yours to be the finest organ in Europe, but at the same time it is one of the most delicate. Therefore I say again, you must be careful."

And so Severn Barnes left Milan, and came back to England.

The ragged boy who had summoned Silvester Langdale to the death-bed scene of old Nicholas Darvill's usher, had changed almost out of mind since then. He returned to London a handsome, grown-up young man, with a noble presence and a commanding mien; and he

came back to London with a full knowledge that he possessed those outward personal attractions. Of course he knew the occupation in which his father and mother were engaged in the household of Silvester Langdale, and that his patron's house was their home; so the moment he arrived in London he proceeded thither, but he found that Mr. and Mrs. Langdale were then upon an autumn visit to Lord Montalban, in the country, and of course Abel Barnes was with his master. The house in London had been left in charge of the housekeeper, Severn Barnes's mother; and besides the house, another charge had been left with Severn Barnes's mother, in the person of Silvester Langdale's ward, Miss Helen Lebar, who was to follow Mr. and Mrs. Langdale into the country in a few days.

Now it so happened that when Severn Barnes called at Mr. Langdale's house,

his mother was not at home, and being informed that Mr. Langdale was in the country, and that Abel Barnes was with him, the young man exhibited such palpable indications of disappointment, not to say trouble, that the servant who had answered his summons at the door, as much in pity as from any other prompting feeling, said that Miss Lebar was in; probably the gentleman would like to see that lady.

Severn Barnes had no notion who Miss Lebar was, having never heard her name before; but he at once said that he should like to see the lady, and he was accordingly shown into one of the reception-rooms, and in a few minutes Miss Lebar entered the room.

Know her! why, he recognised her instantly, and she as quickly recognised Severn Barnes; but how changed they were in appearance, both of them! They

both felt embarrassed, and yet they knew not why. The little girl that Severn Barnes had seen run into the drawing-room shortly before he left England, and on the occasion of his last interview with Mr. Langdale, had grown into a beautiful woman; at least, she was no longer a child, and so Severn Barnes felt embarrassed in her presence.

The good-looking boy whom Miss Lebar had seen for a few minutes on the same occasion had grown into a handsome young man, with the bearing of a gentleman, and with an interesting presence; she, therefore, was more embarrassed than Severn Barnes: they neither of them thought of the change which had occurred in both — they only saw the change that had so strikingly taken place in each other.

"Do you recollect me?" faltered Severn Barnes.

"Oh yes," replied Helen Lebar, eagerly, "I knew you directly. When did you return from Italy?"

"I have but this day returned."

"I knew you directly," said Helen Lebar; "but you are greatly altered."

"And so are you," Severn Barnes said, "and yet I knew you."

Helen Lebar was very pretty, very artless, and probably was very impressionable. She had lived in the house of Silvester Langdale during the time that Severn Barnes was away in Italy; but she had not been in public much as yet. She had become an especial favourite with Mrs. Langdale, who looked upon her as a kind of foster-sister, and treated her as such. Her beauty was in striking contrast with that of Mrs. Langdale; for while Silvester Langdale's wife had dark, rich hair—very dark, indeed—Helen Lebar was a bright blonde, her hair was

of the brightest auburn, and her eyes of the lightest blue. When Severn Barnes met her on his arrival in England, she had just budded out of girlhood, as it were, and she looked very charming. Is it at all remarkable that that young man, and that artless, beautiful girl, should have experienced an unusual, to them a very novel pleasure in that interview? We fancy not; at all events, they enjoyed that mutual pleasure. The situation of each was peculiar. That was Helen Lebar's home, she had no other; it may be said that Severn Barnes came there to look for a home, for were not his father and mother engaged as servants in that house? That thought struck suddenly and grated harshly upon the young man's mind, and he hesitated to ask for either his father or his mother. That beautiful girl before him doubtless knew—of course, how could she be living in that establish-

ment and not know?—that his father and mother were menials in the service of the master of the house. The thought sent a blush into his cheeks, and the worser part of his mind exhibited itself partially in that blush. The boy who had exhibited so much feeling when Silvester Langdale had informed him of what he intended to do for him with Mr. Spaltok, had changed in more respects than in outward appearance, or that blush would not have suffused his cheeks. How little did Helen Lebar, the artless and trusting and generous girl as she was, divine the real cause that had produced that blush! Why, it made Severn Barnes look still more interesting in her eyes; but when she exclaimed joyously, as though she herself was sharing the pleasure he must feel in the meeting—and doubtless she did feel that pleasure—

"You must be anxious to see your

mother: I will send for her," he became pale as suddenly as he had blushed, and perhaps his better feeling was asserting itself. At all events, he said "You are exceedingly kind," as she rang the bell. In another minute a message was despatched to the housekeeper, and a few minutes after that message was delivered, Miss Helen Lebar was in tears; yes, big, rolling tears were welling out of her eyes, and coursing down her cheeks; but she was not distressed. Oh no; she was in an ecstasy of pleasure, for the moment that Mrs. Barnes entered the room she uttered a wild cry, and that handsome boy—for he was a boy—was locked in her arms. And that embrace at once drove away the feeling that had called the blush into Severn Barnes's face, and he returned its pressure fervently.

"Why, you are a man, my dear boy," cried his mother through her tears. "Oh!

this moment repays me for a life of misery."

Misery! thought Helen Lebar, as she gazed upon the mother and her son. She had never heard Mrs. Barnes speak of misery; what could the allusion mean? Helen Lebar had often told Mr. Langdale's housekeeper, when in confidential conversation, that she thought Mrs. Barnes must have been very handsome in her youth, and Mrs. Barnes would smile sadly at that, and reply, that people had said so when she was young; and it was not so many years ago as the young lady might think, when she was young and handsome as the people said; and she would inform Helen Lebar when in conversation thus, that she was not always poor and dependent, for that in her youth she had been carefully tended and luxuriously brought up at a young ladies' establishment; but why should she talk

of those times to that pretty face that was before her? And then she would kiss the pretty face that was before her, and smooth that bright hair down the forehead of that sweet face, and bid the young girl speak to her of herself; and she would do so, and the elder woman would listen to her lovingly, and sometimes fall to weeping when the conversation ended.

Oh yes, Helen Lebar felt as much rapture in that meeting of the mother and son as did either of them, and that was why she was weeping and smiling too.

"Has he not grown, Miss Helen?" said Mrs. Barnes, turning to the young lady, her first burst of delight at the meeting over. "You will pardon a fond mother's feelings, wont you? Why, I do believe you are crying, Miss Helen; what can you have to cry about?" And

to show how silly it was of the young lady to do any such thing, Severn Barnes's mother burst into tears herself again.

When the three had calmed down into a little less exuberance of feeling, Miss Lebar suggested to Mrs. Barnes that her son would necessarily require some refreshment after his journey; but Severn Barnes declared that he did not, because he had come straight from an hotel. Mrs. Barnes, however, did not wait to hear the denial, and, inwardly reproaching herself for so neglecting her poor boy, hastened from the room to her own.

"You are, I suppose, an accomplished musician now, Mr. Barnes?" Helen Lebar said, with a smile.

"I have brought some strong certificates with me," he said, modestly.

"Oh, I am sure that Mr. Langdale will be delighted to hear it;" and then Helen Lebar glanced timidly at an open piano

that was in the room, and with almost a frightened look she said, "I am passionately fond of Italian music; might I ask you to try one of your songs that you learnt in Italy?"

Might she! Why, Severn Barnes was more than delighted at the request she had made, and sat down at the piano.

Mrs. Barnes stands at the half-open door, spell-bound, as it were. That full, rich, melodious voice that rolls round the chamber like a wave of melody, makes her hold her very breath. Move not, mother of Severn Barnes, lest you should interrupt the current of those splendid cadences. It is your son, woman, who is filling that chamber with those tones which make enraptured audiences noisy with enthusiasm. It is a voice that will delight great audiences soon; but, Severn Barnes, you will never be honoured with

listeners whose hearts will throb at the sound of your voice like that small audience you are singing to now, although the great crowd may greet you with enthusiasm, and be far more demonstrative in their wild applause; and you will think so too, although perhaps you do not now.

The song is ended, and Helen Lebar stands chained.

Oh, Silvester Langdale, you have been a true and faithful trustee to the will of the dead man who left his loving child to your care! You have watched her tenderly, and if she had been your sister, you could not have guarded her more anxiously. She is in peril now, but you do not know it. She has a guileless heart that is plastic now, and to her danger. You are far away from her; perchance, if you were near her you would not perceive that which, if thought of, would be a

kind of madness to you. And it is a moment of happiness with her—a happiness her child's heart has never known before.

Oh, is there a fiend that sits unseen and unfelt upon the heart of all humankind, to mock at happiness and blight it—to counteract the good that is born with us all? A study of the human heart might almost lead us to a belief in that.

After some time, Severn Barnes laughingly said that he must now see about delivering the certificates that he had brought with him, and first of all he had, he said, to go to Spring Gardens, where he would write to Mr. Langdale and inform him of his arrival. And so he took his leave—the refreshments that had been provided having been duly honoured—and promised that he would return early in the evening.

The whole of that day until the evening, Helen Lebar spent with Mrs. Barnes.

Severn Barnes said that, first of all, he had to go to Spring Gardens, and thither he went, for the letter which he carried with that superscription bore the name of Marl Baskerville. Severn Barnes had forgotten the name, but the moment he saw him he remembered the man. The recognition was not mutual, for although Marl Baskerville had seen young Severn Barnes several times as a boy, his recollection with regard to him was not so lively as that of Helen Lebar. As soon, however, as he read the letter which Severn Barnes handed to him, he exclaimed,—

"And you are Mr. Langdale's *protégé*, are you? Well, I should not have known you. The signor here speaks in ecstasies of you, and writes to say that you have got the finest voice in Europe."

Severn Barnes bowed, but it was a kind

of bow that seemed to imply that he knew it himself, and acknowledged it as a matter of fact. Indeed, Severn Barnes was exhibiting—only slightly at present, it was only incipient—that overweening conceit which seems to seize upon all who attain to anything like success upon the stage. Probably Marl Baskerville noticed this, although he did not show it either by word or gesture.

"I suppose the signor told you that I am mixed up with the man who has the opera just now. It is an English opera company."

"The signor," whoever that personage was, had not given Severn Barnes the information, and the young man of course said so.

"Well, you are come at a most opportune time," said Marl Baskerville, "for they want a first-rate tenor. I am no judge of these matters myself."

And as he said this he smiled, and placed a seat for Severn Barnes,—as usual, opposite to the light. That strange man of Spring Gardens gazed into the face of Severn Barnes, and as he did so the smile upon his countenance seemed to die away into a cloud, as it were. Perhaps the expression of Severn Barnes's face had called up recollections of former times in some inscrutable way. It may be so; for if Severn Barnes could have observed those eyes that a minute ago were looking into his face, but which were now turned away, he would have seen the wild and weird expression to which we have more than once previously made reference.

The feeling—if it were a feeling—in Marl Baskerville's mind is gone, and he says, "Suppose we go up and see Snarlstone at once."

Snarlstone was the manager of the

opera with which Marl Baskerville had said he was mixed up.

And so they took their way to the theatre, which was not exactly an opera-house, but which just at this time had an opera company for its principal attraction. English dramas were also performed there, but the association did not seem congenial.

Marl Baskerville and Severn Barnes drove through the labyrinth of wretched streets in order to reach the theatre, and they turned out of one that perhaps was the most wretched of all in order to reach the stage door of the theatre which was their destination. At this mysterious doorway they stopped, and Marl Baskerville with his friend at once entered without being questioned by the vigilant door-keeper. Questioned! The man bowed obsequiously to Marl Baskerville, and opened for him the door that led to the regions beyond.

In a dark passage leading to the stage they stopped to look at "the call," which they had to read by the aid of the glimmering light which came in at the door. Many times did Severn Barnes read it over, and yet there was but little to read in it. It was brief and perfectly technical, for it was as follows:—

WEDNESDAY, TWELVE O'CLOCK.

READING A NEW PIECE.

Everybody concerned.

Having read this interesting *affiche*, and made a few comments upon it, they passed on through a narrow doorway and found themselves in the labyrinth of the wings and "grooves" of the stage of the theatre, and they passed through these on to the stage, where for a few moments Severn Barnes had to stand alone, for Marl Baskerville proceeded to another part of

the theatre, having requested Severn Barnes to remain where he was for a minute or two. The young man felt oppressed with the almost supernatural silence of the place. The daylight which struggled through the window up high in the roof was not sufficient to illuminate the locality of the stage, and the scenes appeared in consequence all of one colour, a deep indistinguishable dusky hue, not pleasant to the eye nor suggestive to the mind. But the mind of Severn Barnes was active enough as he stood upon that silent and deserted stage, albeit its aspect was calculated to depress the mind of an ordinary stranger by its almost cimmerian gloom. He gazed out beyond the stage into "the house," and pictured in his imagination those empty benches filled by an enthusiastic audience applauding the new piece, or his own appearance, and then he became flushed in his countenance,

as, looking up to the proscenium, he still, in imagination, viewed the descent of the green curtain.

Presently Severn Barnes observed a young man very near to him on the stage, also scanning the house out beyond the orchestra. This gentleman Severn Barnes afterwards discovered was the author of the new piece that was about to be read. Severn Barnes, however, had no time closely to observe the gentleman, as the stage-manager at the moment came in, and, shaking the author by the hand, said, "Good morning—how do you do?" in a hurried manner; and then turning to a scene-shifter, inquired if the prompter had arrived.

The scene-shifter believed that the prompter was then in the green-room.

"Come along, then," said the stage-manager to the author; "they'll all be here in a few minutes, and we had better

not keep them waiting." And he bustled along the passage with a good show of business importance and punctuality, just as though he had been in the theatre to the minute of the appointed time. At this point Severn Barnes was rejoined by Marl Baskerville, who said—"Come with me to the green-room, and hear this piece read."

In the green-room they found the prompter, with a table arranged ready for the approaching ceremony which involved so many of the hopes of the anxious author.

And now the ladies and gentlemen of the company began to arrive. First came the lady of genteel comedy, who was a recent importation to the theatre, and who was timid and retiring. It was her first season at this theatre, and her first character was to be in the new piece. She advanced to the author, and earnestly

apologized to him for being late, but she had been detained on the way, she said. Her apologies were of course unnecessary, as the author told her, seeing that she was the first to arrive. She thanked him with a sweet smile, and retired to the recess formed by one of the windows of the green-room.

"Good morning, Sparkle," said the stage-manager to a dashing gentleman who has just arrived, and swaggers into the green-room as though not only the theatre but the block of streets in which it is situated belong to him. "How are you?" he says. "Are you going to read this thing to-day?"

This interrogatory applies to the new piece, and the author, who is standing near, feels anything but flattered by its being designated as "this thing."

"Oh yes, of course!" replies the stage-manager. "Let me introduce you to the

author of the new piece." And he formally introduced the author to Mr. Sparkle, who was the light comedian of the company. The light comedian was light enough in his recognition of the author, for he merely bowed and passed out of the green-room on to the stage, saying "Good morning; late again, eh?" to a matronly-looking lady who entered the room at the moment, and exclaimed in reply—"Well, *you* needn't talk; you haven't been here an hour, I'll be bound." This was the actress whose line was the "heavy lady."

"Everybody concerned" had now arrived, with the exception of the two principals. There were the second low comedian, a very jovial, good sort of fellow, and capital actor; the heavy low comedian, whose reputation had been founded originally upon his bulk, and had been sustained by ejaculatory sen-

tences, such as "I don't doubt you, my swell!" "There you go with your-r-r-r-e eye out!" "I'm better than I used to was!" which having descended to the streets, had been appropriated by the boys to the extension of the comedian's fame, and his glorification on every occasion on which he appeared on the stage. Indeed, he never appeared thereon without a stormy reception from the gallery. Then there was the walking gentleman, who was very fast off the stage, whatever he was on; and then there was the first young lady, whose dresses were the most magnificent in the theatre, and who came in a brougham to rehearsals; she was a fi girl, and on the stage looked very beautiful.

The other occupants of the green-room filled up the corners thereof, and talked in whispers to each other. Presently Mr. Sparkle, with the principal comedian on his arm, sauntered into the green-

room, in conversation with each other. Without taking notice of any one present, or seeming to be aware of the fact that all present were waiting for them in order to commence the business of the morning, they went over to the unoccupied window, and there conversed in an earnest whisper; the other occupants patiently waiting until it should please them to allow the reading to proceed.

After they had been in conversation for some ten minutes, Mr. Sparkle turned suddenly round and exclaimed—"Well, are we going to be kept waiting all day?" just as though he had been exhibiting the utmost amount of patience, and had been kept there against his will, as indeed, by the way, probably he had.

The stage-manager intimated that the lady of the principal comedian had not arrived, and of course they could not proceed without her.

"Oh, she wont be here this morning," said the principal comedian, who was so short that he had to come right into the middle of the green-room, so that nobody should stand before him, in order that he might be seen at all. "There was no necessity for her coming," he added; "because, you know, she has already heard the piece read."

The other occupants of the green-room looked at each other and laughed significantly.

"Very good," said the stage-manager; "then we may as well proceed. Will you sit here, sir?" And he handed the author, who was almost overwhelmed with embarrassment, to the table, and that gentleman took his seat thereat, and at once entered upon his task—which was a task indeed to him—of reading the piece. He had not got through many pages before he became hot and feverish. He read on

and on, and as far as any expression of feeling was concerned in those to whom he was reading, he might as well have been reading to the bare walls. This made his blood tingle in his cheeks, and it was almost palpable that his spirits began to sink within him. Some of the points in the piece, which he had fervently hoped would tell with great effect, fell without the least symptom of recognition on the part of those he was reading to. He gulped down draughts of water from the decanter which was placed beside him, and with a great effort he proceeded. At length some one amongst those who were standing about the corner of the room, laughed feebly at some witticism which he read; and that laugh, faint though it was, must have fallen like balm upon his spirit. It reanimated him, and he dashed briskly on. The originator of that laugh doubt-

less little thought of the service he rendered to the author in that small laugh which he had, involuntarily perhaps, jerked out.

At length the last line of the last scene was reached, and the reading of the new piece was terminated.

Marl Baskerville and Severn Barnes then took their way back to the stage, and there they found Snarlstone in earnest consultation with the conductor of the orchestra.

"Oh, I'm glad you're come, Baskerville; I was just going to send down to you. I've got such a stunning opera;" and as Mr. Snarlstone said this he took Marl Baskerville on one side on to the stage.

"Good tenor part in it?" asked Baskerville.

Mr. Snarlstone looked with some surprise at Baskerville, for the question

sounded strange as coming from him; but he answered emphatically, "A stunner!"

"Read that, then," said Marl Baskerville, laconically, and handing the signor's letter to the manager.

Marl Baskerville had told Severn Barnes that he was no judge of operatic matters, but as he listens to the scena that the signor's pupil is performing upon that stage, he whispers to the manager, Snarlstone, "Well, that is something like a voice!"

"Splendid! splendid!" acquiesces the usually morose manager, enthusiastically.

Through all the musical circles of the metropolis the rumour that same evening went rapidly about, that a new opera was in preparation at the Parthenon, and that the finest English tenor that had been heard in London since the days of Incledon was to appear in it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE NEW TENOR.

The fame of young Severn Barnes, as we have said, rapidly extended amongst the musical circles of the metropolis, and as the time for the production of the new opera approached, the rehearsals at the theatre were eagerly attended by those who had the privilege of being in the theatre at the time, and of introducing their friends. The result was, that the fame of the new tenor steadily extended itself out of doors beyond the musical circles of the metropolis.

As the opera was a grand one, and as it contained many scenic effects, the

theatre was closed on the night before its production, in order that a full-dress night rehearsal might be had. To this rehearsal the manager invited all the critics of the day and the principal musical professors, together with his personal friends. Severn Barnes, of course, had the privilege of inviting his friends also, and the manager was most anxious that he should exercise this privilege, for he knew that those friends moved in the very highest ranks of society.

Silvester Langdale and his wife had come up from the country purposely to be present, and they had invited Lord Montalban and the Duke and Duchess of Chaumontel to accompany them, and those noble personages had consented to do so.

There was a very brilliant gathering of both intellect and rank at that rehearsal, and the occasion was certainly worthy of it. The opera was a very grand one; the

music was by a native composer, who seems to be possessed of the faculty of streaming melody from his fingers' ends; and the mounting of the piece was very gorgeous. The principal character in the opera was well calculated in all respects to produce a favourable impression for Severn Barnes. He had to wear dresses that would display his fine figure to great advantage, and the music he had to sing was of that attractive nature that was certain to go direct up into the gallery, and thence descend into the streets, there to roll through the traduced itinerant bands and barrel-organs unceasingly, to say nothing of those drawing-rooms in which it would float about in the evening-time, and morning too, during the hours of practice.

The rehearsal of the opera was faultlessly got through, and the Duke and Duchess of Chaumontel quite gave them-

selves up to applause. Indeed the Duchess, who had never been present at a rehearsal before, said it was the most charming thing she had ever assisted at. She was especially delighted with the interruptions that took place in the course of the rehearsal, in order to perfect various striking points, and that final instructions should be given to the lay noblemen and the knights at a shilling a night. Some of these, although they had been drilled for a month, were rather awkward still; they would, as it seemed, pertinaciously jostle each other, until the stage-manager would lose his patience, much to the hilarity of those in the body of the house, who laughed heartily when the stage-manager, in one of those stage whispers which are heard all over the house, exclaimed to the super-master, "I told you, Mr. Drudgin-spike, to keep all those knock-kneed behind; they can't stand straight, of

course;" and so the super-master went to the back of the stage, and rearranged the knock-kneed knights.

The chorus was the occasion, too, of a little difficulty every now and then, but as the experience of the London opera chorus may be said to extend back to time immemorial, of course the members thereof quickly apprehended any instructions that were given to them; and so, when any little hitch or difficulty did arise, it was speedily got over.

The chorus at the opera is a very remarkable body, respecting whose course of life there has been no chronicler yet, and yet that course must be of necessity full of striking incident. The chorus corps in an opera is always an object of great interest with us. We have watched those unchronicled celebrities with a gratification which the enjoyment of the current piece has not exceeded. The

scenes of horror, of degradation, of ecstatic joy, of terrible misery, of boundless wealth and abject poverty, that we have seen the leading members of that corps conspicuous in, are beyond the reach of the coherent romancist. Why, there is that little sturdy, hard-featured old man, who always struts about second or third on the O.P. side of the stage, from our earliest youth we have noticed him. When we were a child delighting in the pantomime, that chorus-singer was a little sturdy, hard-featured old man, and probably had been ever since the great fire of London, about which time operatic performances came into vogue. We have seen that little sturdy old man as a prince of the highest degree, scattering wealth about him as though he were sowing coins; within an hour we have seen him in wretched rags, and one of an outcast band whose poverty is so intense that it

leads to the commission of most mysterious crimes, such as stealing female children and bringing them up luxuriously in their wretched dens, and dressing them up in jewels and variegated muslins, so that they may be worthy of the splendid inheritance which they invariably and inevitably come to. Again, we have seen him as one of a desperate band of brigands scowling through a wild chorus, which, with a crash, proclaims that they must be silent as the grave, for the victims approach; in performing which clanging crash indicative of the silence the band must observe in consequence of the close propinquity of the unfortunate victims, the members of the chorus affectionately tap long knives that they carry in their belts; and some—the little sturdy old man always does—draw them forth and flourish them in the air; and having thus roused all the slumbering echoes of

the surrounding mountains, they steal off the stage with their fingers to their lips, preparatory to stealing on when the unsuspecting victims, two ladies and a child, have got through the grand scene that they have to perform in that situation. And it is something quite harrowing to the young soul to see the ferocious manner in which that sturdy little old man seizes the prima donna by the wrist, and brandishing his long knife, and with other appropriate action, indicates that she must quietly yield and be conducted to the cave, or else it will be instantly all over with her. He kindly, however, releases her just for two minutes, in order that she may repeat the concluding portion of the scena with the necessary imploring action of the bare arms addressed emphatically to the conductor of the orchestra, who at the moment is not paying that attention to her which the

intensity of the scene requires, inasmuch as he is looking daggers at a rebellious trombone, that has just passed a false note where the flute should have come in. On the very same night we have seen that sturdy little old man of the chorus passing himself off as a Dutch boor, and doing it so admirably, too, that you might almost believe yourselves in the neighbourhood of Helvoetsluys, if the scene-shifter had not persisted in putting on a mountainous country at the back, although the corps of the chorus, as he must know, is declaring vociferously that in another quarter of an hour or twenty minutes they will be near the royal palace at the Hague.

Ah, indeed, the life of an operatic chorus-singer is one of eventful and constantly recurring change, and the desperate adventures that he has to go through six nights in one week of his

engagement might supply a romancist with materials for an age.

The aristocratic party that is surrounding Silvester Langdale—he has his wife on one side of him and Helen Lebar on the other, in that box that is immediately in front of the stage—have been delighted with the rehearsed performance; but there is no one, perhaps, who has been so delighted as the young girl who is sitting by the side of Silvester Langdale. Yes, there is one who is perhaps more delighted than any one in that audience, but yet she sits up in one corner of a little box above the tier in which Langdale and his party are seated, and she is weeping, too. One would think, to look at her, she was weeping bitterly, and that that big burly form by her side was trying in vain to comfort her; but no, she is weeping for excess of joy, and she is whispering that it would be worth going through all

her misery and trials over again for such a moment as that.

Silvester Langdale feels proud of his *protégé*, and the Duke and Duchess of Chaumontel congratulate him upon having been the means of giving such an operatic gem to the musical world; and when Severn Barnes rides home with his patron in the carriage, he expresses his gratitude to Silvester Langdale; and he, too, feels proud indeed, and the same idea has struck both Langdale and his wife, as they ride along, that a more interesting pair could scarcely be seen than Severn Barnes and Helen Lebar, then sitting side by side in the carriage.

The public appearance of Severn Barnes the next night was an unmixed triumph, and he became a brilliant star upon the instant. His success was recorded to be the most marked of the age, and he became a rage.

Surely Silvester Langdale was not departing from the spirit of the charge he had accepted when he became the guardian of Helen Lebar, in receiving Severn Barnes as the suitor for her hand. It was an eligible match on both sides; it was eminently a love-match, as any one could see, and Silvester Langdale was but discharging a sacred duty in fostering it. Severn Barnes was therefore openly received as the accepted suitor of Helen Lebar, who was indeed happy in her choice, the object of her young heart's bright affection. Silvester Langdale had informed Severn Barnes that Helen Lebar had considerable property in the West Indies, and so in every way the match appeared to be an auspicious one. But, in the words of the song that Augusta Montalban had sung to Langdale—

"The morn may break in brightest hue,
The sun may rise in glory bright,
Undimm'd by e'en a fleeting cloud
To mar the glory of his light;
But yet the noon such clouds may show,
And o'er that brightness shadows fling:
So we on earth can never know
The troubles that an hour may bring."

All had been indeed bright hitherto, but yet the clouds were gathering over Silvester Langdale's house.

CHAPTER IX.

HELEN LEBAR MADE PENNILESS.

A BRILLIANT opera season has passed away, and Severn Barnes, although so young in years, is in the zenith of a fame that has become European. Indeed, he has already entered into continental engagements. He is one of the gayest of the gay, and he had of course become conceited. Sometimes when he appeared in public he was offensively so, but perhaps this was only to be expected, for what a change had a few years effected in his life! From a ragged boy, almost without a meal, he had become the pampered guest of the highest and the noblest in the land, and it was intended

that he should marry the ward of the most rising professional man of the day. Why, the Marquis and Marchioness of Milltown gave special parties in his honour, and it was observed that the Marchioness had taken a most marked interest in him. On the night that Severn Barnes made his *début* before the public, the Marchioness of Milltown occupied the most conspicuous box in the house, and it was generally remarked that the noble Marquis himself was never more brilliantly made up than on that occasion. Severn Barnes was constantly at their house, and the Marchioness was so attentive to him that the people who were cognizant of the fact shook their heads, and remarked that nothing else was to be expected, and indulged in inuendoes, which were most of them founded in ill-nature, and had no warrant in reality. The society in which the Marchioness of

Milltown moved was of necessity very limited in its sphere; her chief resource of course was in places of public amusement, at all of which of every kind she was well known. To those who could look beyond the surface, a strong motive could be discovered for the predilection that she exhibited for the society of Severn Barnes. He was engaged to be married to the ward of Silvester Langdale, whose wife was the daughter of Lord Montalban, who was the kinsman of the Duke of Chaumontel, who was her husband's father. Surely there was motive strong enough and innocent enough, and that motive was indulged. Had the Marchioness of Milltown an idea that when Severn Barnes was married he would bring his bride to visit her, and so establish a social link between herself and the great family to which she had been united? It might have been so, it pro-

bably was so. The Marchioness of Milltown entertained no feeling towards Severn Barnes that she might not have indulged in towards a brother. Indeed they became so intimate that she used to say, jokingly, that she looked upon him as a kind of brother; and then people would remark that they might very well pass for brother and sister.

Severn Barnes had been constant in his attentions to Helen Lebar, and apparently there could not have been a more ardent lover, but no definite time had as yet been fixed for the marriage; and as circumstances turned out, the day was never fixed.

It was a good many months after his first introduction to Helen Lebar, that Silvester Langdale one evening called Severn Barnes into his library. The young man could see that the barrister, his patron, had something serious upon his mind, and he at once concluded that

he was now going to propose that the day for Helen Lebar's wedding should be fixed. This idea, however, was at once dispelled by Silvester Langdale saying, as soon as they entered the library, and he had closed the door after them—

"Barnes, I have some bad news to tell you."

"Indeed, sir!" said Severn Barnes, feeling alarmed.

"I think I have no doubt, that I have no occasion to doubt, the sincerity of your attachment to Helen Lebar?" Silvester Langdale observed.

"I think not, sir," said Severn Barnes, rather puzzled at the observation of Silvester Langdale.

"I look upon that girl as my sister; I have treated her as such, and I shall continue to do so; and therefore I need not say that I have her happiness and welfare deeply at heart. It was a source of great

satisfaction to me to see the affection that sprang up between you. I know that her feeling towards you is ardent and devoted—I think that yours towards her is equally strong."

"Sir, she is dearer to me than all the world; she is the star of my ambition, when I am seeking that applause which my position gives;" and the young man appeared to speak warmly.

"I understand you," said Silvester Langdale; "you are in a position now that gives you more than applause,—you are in the possession of material success. I think I need not ask you the question that is implied in my suggestion and belief. From what I have seen, then, I do believe that you entertain a warm affection for Helen Lebar—for herself alone."

"For herself alone, indeed," answered Severn Barnes, with strong feeling.

"Then I can make the communication to you that I desire to do, with no apprehension. I have this night received advices from the West Indies, from which it appears that all the property of Helen Lebar has been destroyed, and that she is now indeed a penniless orphan, dependent wholly upon myself. After the declaration you have made to me, however, I feel the less concern respecting that terrible news with regard to Helen's property than I should have done under ordinary circumstances, because, from your position and prospects, the matter may in reality be of little consequence to her."

And as Silvester Langdale ceased to speak, he looked earnestly into the countenance of the young man before him.

Severn Barnes had never been informed what was the extent of Helen Lebar's property, or of what it consisted.

"I am indeed deeply grieved to hear

the news, sir, as much on your account as on that of Miss Lebar. I did not know until this moment of what her property consisted, or rather that it was situated in that part of the world; for I do not now know of what it consists."

"It did consist of a West India estate, which was once of more value than it was of late. I cannot say that now, because it is, it seems, almost wholly destroyed."

"Wholly destroyed, sir?" said Severn Barnes. "How can material property be so destroyed?"

"In those regions I believe easily. The place has, it seems, been scourged with one of those natural visitations which are appalling in their effects. It would seem from the information that I have received, that the property upon which Helen Lebar depended, was in the midst of the desolation with which the island has been visited."

"But what is the exact nature of the catastrophe?" Severn Barnes inquired.

"Of its exact nature I shall learn to-morrow from the commercial agents; at present I only know it is overwhelming as far as the property is concerned."

"And that is all that Miss Lebar possessed, sir?"

"All. Her father himself, when he died, although in a good professional position, had no property or inheritance of his own. This West India property came to his child through connections of his wife, only a few months before he died, and to my guardianship he left it."

"It is a melancholy reverse," said Severn Barnes.

"I could almost wish that the property had never existed at all. Nay, I do wish it, seeing that it has never been

actually enjoyed by those for whose benefit it was left."

"Then Miss Lebar has not enjoyed the property?" Severn Barnes said, in an unconcerned tone, or what appeared to be so.

"Not in the ordinary acceptation of the phrase. She merely knows that I am her guardian, and that this my house is her home; and let me add, for of course I may do so to you, that she has gradually come to look upon your mother as her own."

Why does Severn Barnes, the operatic celebrity, turn suddenly pale at this intimation? Silvester Langdale observes the expression on the young man's countenance. He cannot but do so, for it is marked; but he does not see in it any indication that should cause him anxiety, or even surprise. Severn Barnes had only a general knowledge that Helen Lebar was

an heiress, and that she was Mr. Silvester Langdale's ward. He could not conceal from himself that the affection which he entertained for Helen was in some sort strengthened by the knowledge that such was her position; the intimation, therefore, which Silvester Langdale had just made to him, came like a sudden misfortune upon him, and his heart for the instant appeared to swell within him; only for an instant, however, and without the slightest outward indication thereof. Indeed it appeared to Langdale that the young man, after a moment's thought, seemed as though he looked upon the disaster to Helen Lebar's fortune cheerily, and as one of no moment; as though he brightened up under the information, rather than that he was cast down by it.

This was very pleasing to Silvester Langdale, who said, "We need say no-

thing of this to Helen at present; poor girl, she will know it soon enough, I dare say. I felt that you would receive it in the true spirit, and my confidence in you has not been misplaced."

And Silvester Langdale gave Severn Barnes his hand, which the young man took tremblingly—which was attributable, as Langdale thought, to emotion.

"Now let us return to the drawing-room," said Silvester Langdale; "and not a word about this to Helen. I can understand your feeling, and appreciate it; it is only what I had anticipated, or I would not have made the communication to you. It is a consolation to me that we both feel this visitation with the same object, that of poor Helen. And yet," he added in a gayer tone, "I do not know that we should take this to heart at all. Why, Barnes, the course of our lives has been a

good deal similar in its character. I came to the metropolis without knowing a friend, and without an acquaintance, and good fortune seemed to have welcomed me at the very outset. And I may now say, that it was a part of my good fortune that made me acquainted with you. Believe me, that that is not the least pleasurable part of the reminiscences that are connected with my earlier career in London."

Why, there was a heartiness in the declaration that might have found its way into the depths of the very coldest heart. Is it to be wondered at then, that a very marked impression should be produced by it upon Severn Barnes? Such impression was produced, and the young man appeared to be agitated by deep emotion.

Silvester Langdale still held the hand of Severn Barnes, and he continued, in

the same tone of light-heartedness as before—

"As I have told you, I look upon Helen Lebar as my young sister. My wife loves her as a sister. She is a part of our household and our home, and it is a great gratification to me to think that you will become her husband—a gratification that has its rise in several causes. I know that she is ardently attached to you—you I know are equally attached to her; you have just made the declaration yourself. Why, we shall all be of one family, for shall we not as it were have married two sisters?"

"And for all this I am wholly indebted to you, Mr. Langdale. How can I ever forget the obligations under which I lie towards you?" said Severn Barnes, warmly.

"Shall I tell you how?" Silvester Langdale asked him, smiling as he did so.

"How?"

"By ceasing to remember them, good friend."

"But will you teach me how to be most grateful for them, sir?" Severn Barnes almost tearfully asked.

"That indeed will I do also."

Severn Barnes looked eagerly into the countenance of his patron.

"By never in any way alluding to them, and by making Helen Lebar a good husband when the time for your union shall have come."

"She shall bless you for me, sir," said the young man, fervently.

Why, he seemed to speak from the centre of his heart.

"It will be so, I hope," said Silvester Langdale, "and what matters it then, if this misfortune has come upon the property of Helen Lebar. As far as she is concerned it is no misfortune, because

she knows nothing of it; and as far as we are concerned, why, I think we are in a position to care little about it. Eh?"

Oh how cheerfully and hopefully Silvester Langdale spoke.

"We little thought when you brought me your poor uncle's note that we should some day be so closely connected as I hope we soon shall be, did we?"

The question sends a pang into the breast of the young man to whom it is addressed. He exhibits outward indication that such a pang is inwardly affecting him, but such indications are not perceived by Silvester Langdale. And happily so, for if he had perceived them, they might perchance have infused just a slight tincture of bitterness into that happiness which at the moment held possession of his heart.

Severn Barnes adroitly changed the current of Mr. Langdale's reflections, by

inquiring if Mrs. Langdale had been made acquainted with the intelligence that her husband had received with regard to Miss Lebar's property.

"No, indeed she has not," replied Silvester Langdale, smiling. "Not that I have purposely kept it from her. I had intended to inform her this evening; but it is a matter that I expect will not trouble her much. It is a kind of boast of hers that she laughs at fortune, and I of course let her laugh."

"Have you spoken to her with regard to myself and Helen Lebar, sir?" Severn Barnes inquired.

"No, I have not; but there is one person to whom I have spoken on the subject in this house."

"And that is——"

Severn Barnes was going to add, "Helen herself," but before he could do so, Silvester Langdale said—

"Your mother."

Again did Severn Barnes become slightly pale; the intimation touched him to the heart, but not with the feeling for which his patron gave him credit.

And they returned to the drawing-room, and there they found other guests, and amongst them Count Moule, who was now a frequent visitor, and who was invariably at Lord Montalban's when the Langdales were there; and whenever he visited either house the company seemed instinctively to fall to playing at cards, and Count Moule was almost invariably fortunate. Augusta Montalban had been always impulsive, and always seeking for excitement. Augusta Langdale doted upon her husband, but she sought for excitement nevertheless; and there can be no doubt that as a wife she was quite as extravagant as she had been when she was at home, the pampered daughter of Lord

Montalban. She had never been denied anything, and certainly the last person in the world to deny her anything would be Silvester Langdale. His wife did not know what his resources were, but she had a kind of vague notion that they were illimitable, and she acted accordingly, and without the slightest check from her devoted husband. Silvester Langdale was in the receipt of a noble income, and yet he was involved in embarrassments. Added to those which Marl Baskerville had placed around him, he had now those of tradesmen of all classes; for Silvester Langdale, although he was not reckless, had no forethought. Money poured in upon him every day, and that really seemed to blind him to the consequences that were lurking beneath a splendid veil. Indeed the embarrassments of Silvester Langdale were increasing almost day by day, while the world at large believed

that he was accumulating wealth with great rapidity. The admiring throng that gathered in the ride at Hyde Park, to contemplate—with eyes of envy, perhaps—the stream of fortune and of fashion that was rolling past them brilliantly, little thought that as Silvester Langdale—now an expert horseman—on his noble steed, and Augusta, his wife, on her gallant thorough-bred, who passed gaily by them in the brilliant retinue, were, or soon would be, a prey to gnawing anxiety—gnawing at the heart, and twining with unseen fangs amongst its very fibres.

CHAPTER X.

THE ELOPEMENT.

It was a gay party that assembled in Silvester Langdale's drawing-room that night, and they played at cards joyously, and Augusta Langdale lost thereat, and Count Moule won,—his usual luck was with him. It was late before Severn Barnes left the house of his patron, but before he did so he had found the means of repeating emphatically and ardently his vows of constancy to Helen Lebar.

Helen Lebar had accompanied her lover into the hall, and there they lingered with the old, old dalliance; so old that it is for ever new. Why, Severn Barnes had told

the loving girl that her guardian had avowed his sanction to their attachment, and had consented to their union, and she hung upon her lover in blissful rapture; and if she had been possessed of all the world, she would have gladly conferred her whole possessions upon the object of her affections.

And was not this a glorious position for a noble heart? Was it not a heaven-created association in which to show its nobleness conspicuously?

Helen Lebar had one favour to ask her lover, there upon that spot, before he leaves the house.

How earnest he is in his protestations that there is no favour that she can ask, that he will not willingly grant.

"Is not our happiness—the happiness of mortals—always intensified by being shared by those we love, dear Severn?"

Why need he answer such a loving question? He feels or thinks that it applies to himself, and he merely smiles an answer.

"Tell me, dear Severn, is it not so?"

"Why need I answer? Do we not both of us feel that the answer is in our hearts?"

"Then I know that you will grant me the boon that I wish to ask."

"Name it, dearest."

"Let us together hasten to your mother's apartment, and make her partaker of the joy we both feel."

Why, the suggestion might have come from an angel. It was born of pure affection, unadulterate love, which animated that smile through which the aspiration was breathed.

But that delighted smile upon the suggestion thus made, instead of reproducing something like a semblance of

itself on the countenance that was so near to it, evoked a shadow.

"Not now, dear Helen; it is hardly an appropriate moment for such a communication," said Severn Barnes, with some hesitation and not a little embarrassment.

"But she so doats upon you," said Helen Lebar, with the artlessness and the purity of early youth. "How glad she will be to hear this cherished intelligence from us!"

"Have you not already spoken to her on the subject?"

"I have only spoken to her of yourself, dear Severn, but never in connection with our engagement. Have you?"

Had he! The question might have struck upon his heart, but that, perhaps, his recent course of life had so encased it as to protect it. Had he spoken to his mother upon the subject? No, he had

not. He had studiously avoided communication with his mother, lest he might inadvertently make the revelation. And yet why should such a feeling have been created in his breast, and how came it there? If we could analyze it, perhaps we should find, judging by after events, that it was a strange admixture, such as the human heart alone can exhibit, of the good and the bad, the one anomalously producing, and at the same time endeavouring to counteract, the other.

"No not now dearest; there is coming an opportunity when we will do so under circumstances, that will be still more pleasing to you and to my mother."

There was nothing fervent in the declaration; nay, it was almost cold, and certainly it was hesitating; but Helen Lebar, the devoted, received it with joyous rapture. At a time more pleasing to her dear mother!—so she considered

her now. Oh! was not that sufficient? Aye!—indeed it was, and she would not press her dear love upon the point any farther now.

Yes, it was as we have said, late before Severn Barnes left the house of his patron, and as he left he carried away with him a glorious treasure, the possession of which might have been a jewel in his soul. It was yet to become the very mainstay of his heart.

The season at the opera-house at which Severn Barnes was engaged was rapidly drawing to its close, and overtures had been made to the now renowned vocalist for an engagement in a continental capital for the approaching winter. After much negotiation this engagement was concluded, and the fact was speedily trumpeted to the world.

Is there anything in the atmosphere of the side scenes of a theatre which in its

nature is calculated to wither, so to speak, the better feelings of moral right which it is said are planted in the breast of all of us? If we could statistically analyze the question, the answer must, we fear, be an affirmative one, and the evidence in all probability would be found, if not exclusively, almost wholly to be applicable to men rather than to women. The moral sensibility of men appears to become blunted by a constant respiration of that atmosphere which pervades the stage behind the curtain. There cannot be much doubt about it, if we probe the matter thoroughly and impartially. This may be, and probably is, the result of circumstances. Men, after all, more easily become the victims to vanity and conceit than women. The men upon the stage, as a rule, are not conspicuous for general intellect or great strength of mind, while ninety-nine out of every hundred men

who don the sock and buskin believe themselves to be geniuses whom the world should foster, and to whom everything should be yielded. They see their names upon the walls constantly flaming before the public, and they come to think that they are the brilliant ornaments, even if they be not the essential supports, of the empire. Their minds become dazzled, their moral sensibilities give way, and hence——well, we will not inquire too closely as to what follows that moral decadence.

When Severn Barnes left Mr. Langdale's house on the night the communication respecting Helen Lebar's fortune was made to him, he thought little of the matter; but the next day he thought much of it, and day by day for some time afterwards he thought much of it; and although when he visited Mr. Langdale's house, as he did daily, there was no ap-

parent change in him, a change of purpose had taken possession of his heart.

The time for his departure for the Continent was at hand, but no arrangement for his marriage had been made, for the simple reason that Silvester Langdale, after mature consideration with Augusta, had come to the conclusion that the ceremony had better not take place until the spring. It was just now about the time when Silvester Langdale should set out for the circuit, and Augusta had decided upon accompanying him, for the season had been a brilliant one, and in her case it may be said to have been also an enervating one. Helen Lebar and Mrs. Barnes were therefore left in town to be housekeepers.

Helen Lebar was barely eighteen, childlike, artless, loving, devoted. Already did she look upon Mrs. Barnes as her mother; she was happy—she was proud

indeed, in the prospect of soon becoming the wife of Severn Barnes; and at any moment, so ardent, so sacrificing, so unsuspecting was her devotion, she would have laid down her life for him, if the sacrifice could have brought fresh happiness to him.

Severn Barnes knew this devotion, and he revelled in it. But he was now a great celebrity in the world of fashion, and young though he was, he had come t look upon such devotion as his due. He had reasoned upon it, too, with himself, and especially on those occasions when he visited the house of the Marchioness of Milltown. Helen Lebar was a portionless girl—an orphan, living upon the good favour of friends who were in no way connected with her by blood. Why, Severn Barnes had brought his heart to reason in this way. Could he not look round him in the brilliant circle to which

he was now admitted? He could—he did—and he saw around titled beauty almost at his feet.

Why need we elaborate the catastrophe? The confiding girl, from the very bottom of her soul, believed in the truth of Severn Barnes, looked upon him as the soul of honour, the god of her idolatry. It is not a matter for wonder, then, that Silvester Langdale should receive, while he is upon the circuit, a letter which is almost prostrating in its effects upon him, although it is illumined by just one solitary ray of hope. Is it something wondrous to record that Helen Lebar has written from Paris to say that her darling, too impatient in his affection, has brought her away to marry her unostentatiously at the British Embassy in that city? Is it an unnatural conclusion that the mind of Silvester Langdale instantly arrives at, that no such marriage will take place?

And under these circumstances, is it surprising that he goes with his heart lacerated to consult with his beautiful wife ?

The conclusion is but too true. The atmosphere that lurks about the green-room has been effectually inspired into his very heart, and Severn Barnes has trampled all the best feelings of the soul—gratitude, affection, generosity—ruthlessly beneath his feet. He has become in heart and soul a villain ; and that beautiful, innocent, loving, tender being, whose golden hair is twining now about his neck, is the victim that bears a terrible evidence against him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEETING AFTER MANY YEARS.

Marl Baskerville and Count Moule are together at the dismal office that looks out upon the dark wall at the back of the Admiralty. Count Moule has come in much haste to Marl Baskerville, to com munication a discovery that he has made respecting the Marchioness of Milltown. The Count, indeed, is quite excited, a most unusual thing with him, as Marl Baskerville remarks.

"Baskerville, you know that that girl has been my pupil." The Count was alluding to the wife of the Marquis of Milltown.

"I have suspected as much," Marl

Baskerville, with a cold but meaning smile, says.

"But, until last night, I have never been able to discover her antecedents."

"And have you discovered them now? I suppose you have, though, by your manner," Marl Baskerville says, as though he were speaking of a very commonplace and trivial matter.

"I have discovered her father. I have found out who she is," the Count cried.

"Oh, then, you must have the wisdom of the fabulous wise child, you know," says Marl Baskerville, laughing cynically.

"Never mind. Suppose I say it's Lord Montalban," almost gasped the Count.

"What!" cried Marl Baskerville, in a tone that seemed a shriek, and his manner changed on the instant.

"Now listen to me, Marl Baskerville, calmly," said the Count in a low voice.

"I have known something of the proceedings of Montalban in his youth, and so have you."

If Count Moule had ever had any doubt as to the expression of those eyes now glaring before him, the present interview must have removed it.

"Lord Montalban was a libertine in his youth," said the Count. "Amongst other exploits, he backed himself to carry off three girls from a boarding school at Brighton."

How fearfully those eyes before the Count are glaring; but suddenly there comes over them a kind of supernatural calmness.

"The world in which Lord Montalban moved—the world of splendid vice and immorality, in which virtue degraded and innocence destroyed were looked upon as trophies, even as they are now amongst the same class—that world glorified

Lord Montalban upon his gallantry, as it was called, his perfidy as it really was."

Marl Baskerville is listening calmly now; but Count Moule instinctively feels that it is a terrible calmness.

"Lord Montalban was not successful in his gallant enterprise," said Count Moule.

"Yes, the demon was. Yes, I say," cried Marl Baskerville, starting up and striking the table with his clenched hand.

"Not wholly successful," said Count Moule.

"Go on," gasped Marl Baskerville, sinking into his chair again.

"He succeeded in carrying off only one," Count Moule added.

"He did!" cried Marl Baskerville, starting up again; "and now I know, Count, what you are come to tell me. The horrid recital is already eating into my

brain. That girl so stolen was the mother of the wife of the Marquis of Milltown—say, is it not so? Torture me not by suspense, but say that I have anticipated your revelation. Say it, and strike another shaft into my aching heart."

Count Moule was wholly unprepared for this outburst, nor could he at all understand it. He therefore said:

"Why this unaccountable excitement, Baskerville?"

"Do not question me. Say, have I anticipated you?"

"You have."

"I knew it. My heart told me so—my instinct, rather"—and Marl Baskerville put his hand to his face and groaned.

"I cannot understand this feeling on your part, Baskerville, and I will not ask you to explain it. I came here with this intelligence, anticipating a far different

reception. You will be calmer presently," said the Count.

"And the mother—where is she?" Marl Baskerville asked.

"She has never known her mother. She only knows that she also was at school at Brighton. That she ran away when she was of tender years. I need not say how we met with her here in London. You know that as well, perhaps better than I do."

"Yes! yes,—poor girl! Poor helpless girl! Murdered, no doubt! Murdered! and by him," mused Marl Baskerville.

"Murdered!" exclaimed Count Moule; "what do you mean?"

"The mother was got rid of, although the child was not abandoned," said Marl Baskerville.

"But you do not suspect foul play towards the mother, surely?" Count Moule suggested.

"Foul play! Have you not already yourself told me how she was the victim of foul play—the foulest, as this Montalban knew well how to play it."

"Then you knew the mother, I suppose?" said Count Moule.

"I did."

"And you knew that Lord Montalban carried her off?"

"I did."

"And whither?"

"No!—there I was baffled; but you have brought to me a clue to that secret that has rankled in my destroyed heart for twenty years. You have infused new life into the petrifaction that I have carried with me for twenty years, and which has throbbed a death-watch, but which is called a heart. You have reanimated my soul. Count, we have worked together, long and honourably both."

"We have worked together," said the

Count, in a tone of correction, and with a kind of sneer.

"Be it so. We have worked together to the same end, and faithfully to each other."

"True."

"Count, I shall place implicit faith in you for the future."

"Have you not done so already?"

"Yes; but the faith henceforth must be of another kind of hue—a more exalted faith to me."

"Upon my soul, I don't understand you, Marl Baskerville," said the Count. "Of course I came here with this intelligence, with a view to the material benefit of us both; but, mind you, I am not going to be a party to any matters that are intended simply to carry out some feelings engendered in years gone by."

"Listen to me, Count. Whatever your views are—and of course I know to what

your observations point—I will faithfully assist you to carry them out, as I ever have done. Do you believe me?"

"I do."

"Surely, then, I may ask for some personal return?"

"Surely you may."

"Then, this I ask of you, Count—it is but a small request in return for what I shall do for you; but it must be made—silence, until I break it—silence profound to all the world, that you have made this communication to me to-day."

"Give me your hand, Marl Baskerville." And Marl Baskerville extended his hand to the Count.

"We have been firm friends since we have known each other—we will be firmer yet," said the Count, as he grasped Marl Baskerville's hand.

"We will," fervently replied Marl Baskerville.

"And hear me further, Marl Baskerville," cried the Count. "You know that Montalban is in my toils; the daughter is enmeshed too."

Marl Baskerville made no reply, but there was a glare in his eyes which spoke of the intensity of the feelings that were raging beneath.

"Come!" he cried, seizing his hat from the table.

"Whither?" inquired the Count.

"As our first step towards a coming end, to Silvester Langdale's house."

"For what purpose there?"

"As we ride along, I'll tell you. Come." And Marl Baskerville and Count Moule left Spring Gardens together.

They hailed the first cab that passed at Charing Cross, and, by Baskerville's directions, were driven to the street that leads out of Grosvenor Square into Hyde Park. When they reached the house,

they were informed by the lacquey that both Mr. and Mrs. Langdale were out of town, as Mr. Langdale was on circuit.

"Tut! tut! I ought to have known that, of course," said Marl Baskerville. "Is there any one I can leave a message with?" he inquired.

"Perhaps you would like to see Mrs. Barnes, the housekeeper, sir?" the man said.

"Yes, I should; let me see her at once," said Marl Baskerville, as he hastily entered the house.

"Step this way, sir, and I will send Mrs. Barnes to you, sir." And the man conducted Marl Baskerville and his companion into one of the reception rooms.

"What is the message that you purpose leaving?" inquired the Count, as soon as the man had left the room.

"I scarcely know myself, as I probably shall send no message. I merely desire to ask a few questions."

"Why not have asked them of the man?"

"He would have known nothing of the matters upon which I desire to seek information. The housekeeper is Abel Barnes's wife, and she will probably know what I wish to ask, for you see the man Barnes has been placed as a kind of steward at the place down in the country, and of course he will tell his wife all he knows, and I want her to tell me of something that he, and consequently she, knows."

The Count did not seem altogether pleased with this course of proceeding, which certainly, in any point of view, looked rather equivocal. He, however, felt that he was wholly embarked with Marl Baskerville, and that he must go through with him whithersoever he might lead.

"This Langdale seems to live in a right noble style," said the Count, smiling.

"He is Lord Montalban's son-in-law," replied Marl Baskerville, "and that is enough for me."

There was not much in the observation, but the manner in which it was spoken intimated plainly enough that not a little of the style and magnificence by which they were surrounded was due to himself.

They were in the recess formed by one of the windows of the room, when this short conversation passed. Presently the room door opened. They turned simultaneously round, and Mrs. Barnes entered the room, the light from the morning sun falling full upon her countenance as it streamed in at the windows. The moment he saw her, Marl Baskerville seized Count Moule convulsively by the arm, and in a voice that was almost inarticulate from the manifest emotion of the speaker, exclaimed,—

"Great God! what do I behold?"

"Baskerville!" shrieked the woman, and sank upon one of the sofas that was near.

"My God—I shall choke!" gasped Baskerville, as he grasped his own throat.

"What can be the meaning of this?" inquired the Count.

"You must have been sent by some fiend that tracks and haunts the path of man, to lead me to this hell. The discovery which you came to communicate to me must have been the prompting of that fiend, in order that I should be drawn to this sight that seems to sear my very eye-balls."

"He is a maniac! I cannot doubt it now," thought the Count.

"Why does she sit there as though she were turned into stone? Three-and-twenty years have not changed her. It

has only wrought its change in me, making me the food for mocking demons." And then Marl Baskerville asked in a whisper of the Count—a whisper that was fearful in its calmness, and the tone in which it was uttered—" Why does she sit there without moving ?".

And Mrs. Barnes did sit there without moving, and with her face buried in her hands.

" Do you know her, then ?" at length inquired Count Moule.

" Know her !—know her ! Do you know me, Harriet Dacre ? Do you know me ?" cried Marl Baskerville, in a voice made hoarse by excitement.

" This scene is inexplicable to me," said Count Moule. " Pray be calm, Baskerville. What is the meaning of it ?"

" Calm ! Calm ! My nerves are now as a block of ice—behold !"

And Marl Baskerville, suddenly assuming his disguise of decrepitude, tottered across the room to where Mrs. Barnes was sitting, and taking her hand, he said,

"Harriet Dacre!"

She turned her eyes full upon him.

"Calm—ay, calm," he said, as he met their gaze, and returned it—only for an instant, however, for he drooped his eyelids as he held that hand.

"Harriet Dacre," he said, "how long is it since we met? Tell this gentleman how long it is ago."

Her bosom heaved convulsively, as she said,

"Mr. Baskerville, what is the communication that you wish to make to me?"

"The flight—the degradation—the murder—the revenge!"

"You terrify me. In Heaven's name, what do you mean?"

The woman had wholly misunderstood Marl Baskerville's allusion, for she thought it had reference to the flight of Helen Lebar with her son, Severn Barnes.

"I have worshipped you lost and dead, in my decrepitude and age, and find you living, but I find you—what?" And he spoke in a tone of horror. And then he instantly changed his manner and his tone, and letting her hand fall, he stood erect in the centre of the room, and in a voice that seemed almost as though it were joyous, he cried,

"Three-and-twenty years ago you had a charm that was powerful enough to change me and my nature. The charm remains; its power is as strong as ever. From this moment I will be young again, devoted to you, and to a sacred purpose. Harriet Dacre, your child lives!"

"He does?" she cried.

"He does—she does," exclaimed Marl Baskerville, in a wild tone.

"What!" shrieked the woman.

"Your daughter; the daughter of one who was betrayed, abandoned—and that daughter afterwards abandoned too; but still to reach a destiny that is bright. Harriet Dacre, I am yet to be your avenging fiend."

Count Moule has looked upon the scene like one bewildered, and he is about to interpose, when Marl Baskerville exclaims,

"Now, Count, I am indeed with you to the death. Come; we have met again, Harriet Dacre. It was but this meeting that was required to nerve me to my purpose. Farewell!"

"My daughter! my child!" shrieked the woman.

"Shall join you soon."

And Marl Baskerville grasped Count Moule by the arm, and literally dragged him from the room, leaving the mother of Severn Barnes in a state bordering on insensibility.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DOUBLE FORGERY.

Silvester Langdale is in the midst of a full stream of professional prosperity, but there are ominous clouds hanging over him, and those with whom he is connected. Embarrassments are pressing round him, but Marl Baskerville is ever at his elbow warding those embarrassments off, and yet still consolidating them as it were. Silvester Langdale's wife is not cognizant of those embarrassments, or at all events not of their extent, and she is continually almost unwittingly accumulating them, for there is no wish that she can form or desire

that she can entertain, that is not at once gratified, even as it has always been from her earliest youth. But of late Marl Baskerville has exhibited a change towards Silvester Langdale, and he has indicated that there must be a different course of proceeding in their transactions for the future. Stealthily, it may be said, has this change been indicated, and Marl Baskerville has urged that the eminent barrister must look to the name of his noble father-in-law as a prop to maintain his credit. Insidiously has this suggestion been made, but at length it has become imperative that it should be adopted, and Silvester Langdale finds that he has not the strength of mind to make the necessary appeal to his noble father-in-law. That hesitation, that want of resolution, if Silvester Langdale could but have observed it, was viewed with inward, perhaps with malignant

satisfaction, by Marl Baskerville, who, with the sophistry of which he was capable, had argued with Langdale that the matter was merely one of form, it was a simple plunge, and all would then go well and smoothly; and so Silvester Langdale apparently yielded, and Marl Baskerville seemed instinctively to know that Silvester Langdale had reasoned with himself, that within a certain time, he had fatally so reasoned with himself always, he would strike away the chains that were encircling him so gallingly.

The instrument which relieved him from his then pressing embarrassments bore the signature of Viscount Montalban, and Marl Baskerville gloated over the document in his dreary office in Spring Gardens.

The embarrassments of Lord Montalban were equally and as secretly pressing, and Marl Baskerville was the agent through

whom they were made active. He also was the evil genius that sat upon the arm of Viscount Montalban, and the same sophistry has produced the same result as in the case of Silvester Langdale, and Marl Baskerville has still further cause for hellish satisfaction in his secret office. But it is more intensified in the case of Lord Montalban, for the weird money-lender in the course of his negotiations with the noble Lord has had to inspect the title deeds to the one solitary estate which Silvester Langdale's father-in-law possesses; and in that inspection he has made a discovery which fills his soul with a new pleasure—a new devilish hope, that makes him adamant in his resolve.

But Marl Baskerville is not impetuous in his terrible purpose. Maniac as he is, he is content to wait till itself shall play his game out for him.

Viscount Montalban has sought an interview with his son-in-law, and the object of it is of serious import indeed.

"Langdale," says Lord Montalban, "you have seen the mysterious paragraph in the papers, doubtless, with regard to a case that is likely to arise about the title to an estate that has long been held by one of 'our noble families;' so the mysterious announcement phrases it?"

"Yes, I have; to what does it allude?" replied Langdale.

"To me," said Lord Montalban with remarkable calmness of manner.

"To you!" exclaimed Silvester Langdale in a tone almost of affright. "How do you mean?"

"It is my estate that is referred to, and I have been served with notice of an action of ejectment."

"Yours?"

"Mine."

"And upon what grounds is the claim made?"

"You must inspect the deeds yourself—at least their nature must be laid before you," said Lord Montalban, with hesitation in his manner.

"But do you not yourself know what the ground of claim is?" Silvester Langdale inquired anxiously.

"All I know is, and I have always known, that there is some defect in the title; but I have always been given to understand that it was only defective to the extent of preventing my disposing of the estate or encumbering it, which my friends have goodnaturedly said was a fortunate thing for me," and Lord Montalban smiled feebly.

"And who is the claimant now?"

"Our lawyers, Sowerbys, have got

the writ, and I do not remember the name."

"I will at once see them," said Langdale.

"Do," said Lord Montalban.

"I will go at once."

Silvester Langdale rose for the purpose.

"Stop," said Lord Montalban, nervously, "I have something else to communicate to you."

Silvester Langdale observed that Lord Montalban's lip quivered as he spoke.

"Upon this matter?" asked Langdale.

"No, a totally different matter, but one upon which it may nevertheless have a most important bearing."

Lord Montalban's hand trembles, and there is a nervous catching of the breath as he speaks, which as he observes makes Silvester Langdale feel nervous too.

"Langdale——"

Lord Montalban utters the name with an evident effort, and then rises and paces the room.

"Why, what is it that agitates you in this manner?" Silvester Langdale anxiously inquires of his noble father-in-law.

"We shall not be interrupted, shall we?"

"No, Augusta is from home this morning."

"I am glad of it—I am glad of it," and as Lord Montalban says this he evidently feels a relief.

"Tell me, pray tell me what it is that you have to communicate—your manner almost terrifies me," said Silvester Langdale, as Lord Montalban continued to pace the room.

"Langdale," exclaimed Lord Montalban, stopping suddenly in the centre of the room, and speaking with an agitation which drove the blood from his cheeks,

"Langdale, very shortly there will be a claim made in respect of a bill that has been discounted."

If Lord Montalban had presented some deadly weapon at the breast of Silvester Langdale, he could not have exhibited more horror in his countenance than he did at this communication. He clung to the table for support, and with a scarcely audible voice he said—

"I know it."

"You know it?" exclaimed Lord Montalban in a tone of astonishment.

"I do, indeed."

"Why—why, how could you know it?" asked Lord Montalban, almost scared by the feeling of astonishment which the declaration created.

"How could I know it? I do not understand you in putting such a question to me."

"Langdale, I have all my life been the

victim of misplaced confidence, but I never felt that fate which seems to hang over me until now."

"Say not so—say not so," said Silvester Langdale in a tone of bitter anguish.

"I see how you feel it, Langdale—the disclosure I knew could have no other result, but believe me that you cannot feel more acutely than I do myself."

"I feel assured of that, indeed I do, and it is that assurance that adds poignancy to what I may truly designate my anguish."

"Do not, Langdale, I pray you, speak in that strain, for it cuts me to the very heart to hear it," said Lord Montalban in a tone that indeed carried conviction with it.

"Strange that he should exhibit such a bearing under such circumstances," thought Silvester Langdale, "but he is

Augusta's father, and that must be the reason of his forbearance."

"I have reproached myself——" Lord Montalban commenced.

"Nay do not do that—pray do not do that, or you will add to the intensity of my sorrow," said Silvester Langdale, interrupting his father-in-law.

"Generous fellow," thought Lord Montalban, "he has a noble heart indeed," and then he said aloud, "Do not take this to heart, Langdale."

"Would that I could not," said Silvester Langdale, feebly.

"But if you do, you will only make me feel my position the more acutely," urged Lord Montalban.

"What is to be done?" asked Silvester Langdale in a tone of desperation.

"The bill must be taken up if we move heaven and earth," said Lord Montalban.

"I bless you for the declaration," cried Silvester Langdale, fervently seizing Lord Montalban's hand.

"Langdale, for your open, generous conduct in this matter, I shall henceforth be prouder of you as my son-in-law than I have ever been," and Lord Montalban spoke as though a huge weight had been lifted from his heart.

"I could not have believed it," communed the young man with himself; "he is, indeed, worthy to be Augusta's father; it is for her, doubtless, that he feels."

As though Lord Montalban could read the thought that was passing in Langdale's mind, such was the impression of the young man, his father-in-law said—

"Not a word of this to Augusta."

"Heaven forbid!" said Langdale, solemnly.

"High-minded man!" Silvester Langdale ejaculated to himself.

"Noble-hearted fellow!" at the same instant Lord Montalban inwardly exclaimed.

And so were they thus mutually deceived. How little did they dream that each had deceived the other, and that the damning proofs of that mutual deception were in the hands of Marl Baskerville to rise up yet as a combined vengeance for a wrong!

"Ah, papa, you here!" cried Augusta Langdale, rushing with fright depicted on her countenance into the room. "What is this, Silvester, that I hear about a claim that is set up to our estate?"

"Your father has just been informing me of it, darling, and I am now going to the solicitors to inquire into the matter."

"But is it so serious as people seem to think it is?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know at all what it is; I am going to ascertain?" said Langdale.

"Where is it that you have heard of it, Augusta?" inquired Lord Montalban.

"I called at the Chaumontel's this morning, and they are full of it."

"Yes, it is other people's business," said Lord Montalban, cynically.

"Oh, of course they naturally feel a deep interest in such a matter," said Augusta Langdale, reprovingly; "and the Duke had gone down to call upon you about it."

The next minute the Duke of Chaumontel was announced. He stalked into the room.

"I say, Montalban, what the devil's this about?" was the Duke's mode of introducing the subject in hand, first having courteously recognised Augusta Langdale and her husband.

"Well, that's what I want to know—that's what Augusta wants to know—and

that's what Langdale was just going to ascertain," said Lord Montalban, laughing, as though they were discussing a very facetious subject.

"Why, it will be all over London in the course of the afternoon," said the Duke.

"Oh, of course it will; it is too good a subject for the gossip-mongers to allow to pass silently," said Lord Montalban.

"Some scheming, pettifogging, rascally, low, blackguard attorney at the bottom of it, I suppose," said the Duke of Chaumontel, loftily.

"Oh, of course," acquiesced Lord Montalban.

"Hopes to be bought off, I daresay," suggested the noble Duke.

"Hopes to get something by it, of course," said Lord Montalban.

"Well, Mr. Langdale, you will have to appear on behalf of the family, I suppose," said the Duke of Chaumontel.

"If it should ever become necessary that my services should be required," replied Langdale, with a very feeble attempt at a smile.

"How strange, dear Silvester, if you should have to appear in the courts as an advocate in such a cause," said Augusta Langdale, almost tearfully.

"Oh! let us hope that the family will not have to pass through any such trial," said Silvester Langdale, cheerily.

"I only wish I could get that pettifogging lawyer before me down at our place, I would give him a trial of a sort that he would never forget!" And the Duke of Chaumontel looked very profound, for he thought he had said a very sagacious thing.

"Well, my Lord Duke, I will go down to Sowerbys, and inquire into the matter, and inform you of it," said Silvester Langdale; and so he wished them good

morning, and told his wife not to be despondent, and he would return to her soon.

Shortly afterwards the Duke of Chaumontel and Lord Montalban went out together.

Silvester Langdale proceeded at once to Sowerbys, the solicitors of Lord Montalban, and there discovered that the case had assumed a serious aspect. The title to the estate was undoubtedly defective, supposing a certain then unknown person should be in existence. It was alleged that this person had been discovered, and in order to secure expedition, an issue—small and unimportant in itself—was raised, and would be set down for trial at the then approaching assizes. This, the Messrs. Sowerbys had learnt from information of their own, and they added that they feared, from the character of the parties with whom they had been in com-

munication, that the case was a serious one.

There were many causes operating upon the mind of Silvester Langdale conducive to a serious mood as he took his way back to his wife near to Grosvenor Square.

CHAPTER XIII.

A THEATRICAL CATASTROPHE.

THERE is a brilliant audience assembled in the grand opera-house. It is not designated the grand opera-house, but it is a grand house nevertheless. It is a grand night, the places have been secured for weeks past, and the generally fortunate people who have free admission and obtain boxes when they ask for them, have been informed that their privileges are suspended, seeing that to continue them just now would be to keep money out of the house, which the said persons would be the last people in the world to do, of course. And the occasion of

this brilliant gathering of rank, fashion, beauty, and fortune, in the grand opera-house, is the appearance of the magnificent young tenor who created such a *furore* last season at another house. The Duke and Duchess of Chaumontel and friends are there; the Marquis and Marchioness of Milltown are there, in the box that is immediately opposite to that of the Duchess of Chaumontel. The Marchioness would have that one, because, as she remarked, with intense feeling, it would enable her to look across at that old catamaran, as she would persist in designating the Duchess of Chaumontel; and so all the time the act-drop was down the lively Marchioness kept her double-barrelled lorgnette fixed upon the box opposite, like a gun placed in position to command a channel. This, of course, the noble Duke could not fail to observe, and it seemed to please him rather than to annoy him;

for he observed to a friend near him, quite glowingly, "that the devil take him if the girl hadn't got the right sort of spirit about her."

The announcement of the appearance of Severn Barnes was, indeed, a great attraction. His celebrity as a vocalist, of course, was the great attraction, but there was a kind of under-current of attraction so to speak. It had got whispered about that the brilliant young tenor had carried off the ward of Silvester Langdale, and not married her as it was once anticipated he would, and most of the goodnatured people of Langdale's acquaintance, when they were informed that Helen Lebar had lost all her property, argued that the young lady's guardian need not take the matter so much to heart, for if Severn Barnes had not carried her off the girl must have become a governess, or something of that sort; and fancy what a

terrible thing that would have been for poor Mrs. Langdale, Lord Montalban's daughter? And they were not all old women either, who reasoned in this way. Young and brilliant beauty turned up its nose when Helen Lebar's name was mentioned, and remarked that if forward things would throw themselves at the feet of brilliant young men, why, they could have but one object in view, and so there could have been nobody but Miss Lebar herself to blame, who, after all, was but an unknown dependant in Mr. Langdale's family—a dependant, or encumbrance rather, that in some way or other had been rescued from a lawsuit of some kind. Poor erring girl!—in all that brilliant circle in which twelve months she had moved, she could find not one solitary friend of her own sex to palliate her error — there was not one who, if she should chance to meet her, would not

frown her down, and the next instant turn with smiling face and encouraging eyes upon her seducer. There was one, indeed, who thought of the fallen girl, and with a sorrowful heart thought of her, and wept for her, and who, in her secret heart, blessed God that her husband had done his duty nobly by the orphan girl—there was one who was resolved to rescue her, or failing in that, to preserve for her the welcome of a noble heart when that inevitable hour should come, when the fallen one should find herself abandoned by her betrayer.

Langdale and his wife were not amongst that splendid audience that had assembled to give the young tenor an enthusiastic welcome, and to act upon the maxim inculcated even by morality-upholders that, with regard to those who are the mimics on the stage, it is better not to look to realities that are behind the scenes. No,

there was one box in all that splendid house that was empty, and that one box was Mrs. Langdale's.

Severn Barnes might have observed it, that small square blank, dark in the midst of splendour, and frowning, as it were, upon him, even as he was bending low before that hurricane of applause that was raging all over that great house. It was a triumphant moment for him, and he was surrounded by a gorgeous galaxy. His whole soul was in that scene—what, if he had observed the empty box, dark as his own ingratitude, he had no place for reflections it might suggest, even if he could at any time have entertained them—no, he was basking in a glorious sunlight that absorbed his soul as he stood there upon that glittering stage a worshipped idol.

The opera was a grand one, too—its story was of blighted love and affection

spurned, and Severn Barnes, before those brilliant and tearful eyes that are like shining diamonds yonder all around him, impersonates the victim for whom those shining eyes shed tears of sympathy. The music scene shows the assumed character of Severn Barnes, the prostrate lover robbed of the object of his heart's affections; and so the brilliant eyes, and the heart beneath, can sympathize with him deeply in his assumed sorrow. And with what fervour does he now execute the soul-stirring melodies with which the opera abounds. It is the remark of every one in that brilliant audience that his voice is more bell-like, richer in its volume than it was last year; and so the opera through its first acts flows on mellifluously and with brilliant *éclat*.

Anxiously and with great hope that elated audience look for the great *scena*, that is the bright gem of the opera, and

of which the third act may be said to consist. It is felt throughout that richly-attended temple of the lyric drama, that it must be an operatic glory, and excitement began to wait upon anticipation. The soul-stirring strains of the opening of the grand *scena* have commenced, and every ear in that great house is listening, and seems enrapt. Severn Barnes has evidently reserved himself for this crowning effort of the night; the notes fall from his lips in voluptuous sounds—his voice has risen to its topmost compass—the clear and ringing sound of that highest note is prolonged—the audience is waiting almost impatiently for that burst, that whirlwind of applause, that seems to be almost a part of the excitement of the scene; when the voice of the singer appears to be snapped, as it were, it is suddenly stopped, and there is a cry in that brilliant house, not of wild ap-

plause, but of horror, as the mouth of the vocalist is observed to be filled with blood, and himself gasping for very life-breath on the stage. He is immediately surrounded by those who are in attendance upon the scene, and is borne from the stage a ghastly object to those who look upon him.

The town was ringing the next morning with the last blast of fame that should swell out the name of Severn Barnes. His career had been a brilliant one, but it was short indeed; for the necessary medical examination had revealed the terrible fact of a fracture in the throat, fatal to the hope that Severn Barnes could ever shine as an operatic star again.

And Severn Barnes is weepingly attended tenderly by the fair girl he had so wronged, and who had so trustingly given her soul up to him. Happily her devotion is not without its reward.

Silvester Langdale was of course soon made acquainted with the sudden termination to Severn Barnes' professional career, which had commenced so brightly, and he determined, after consultation with his wife, to see Helen Lebar. He was pondering almost doubtingly on this determination, and half meditating respecting it, when all hesitation was suddenly dispelled by the receipt of a letter, which imperatively, by its nature, demanded that the mission should be made.

The ordeal they are seeking is a trial to both Langdale and his wife; for they have never seen Helen Lebar since she quitted their roof. Severn Barnes is in bed, prostrated not so much physically as mentally; for his calamity is a bitter one indeed. He is being watched tenderly by his victim, when Silvester Langdale and his wife are announced. The men-

tion of that name, of course, adds another pang to those which Severn Barnes is already mentally suffering, and he buries his face in his hands in very anguish. At first Helen Lebar has a strong repugnance—which, indeed, was but natural—to seeing Silvester Langdale and his wife, until Severn Barnes, in a tone which plainly indicates the prostration of mind he is suffering, tells her that she had better see them, or they might come and see him, and that would be a kind of horror.

The meeting between Helen Lebar and Augusta Langdale was indeed a painful one. For a moment Helen Lebar lingered with downcast eyes, but at the sound of Augusta's voice she looked up; the woman's instinct burst all conventional barriers, and the next instant they were locked in each other's arms.

"You do forgive me?" at length sobbed Helen Lebar.

"Helen, it is in your misfortune—the misfortune that has but lately come upon you—that we have come to you," said Silvester Langdale; "there is scarcely need of forgiveness now."

"Oh, generous hearts, my wrong doing now looks black in my own eyes, indeed," said Helen Lebar, weeping bitterly.

"We will allude to that no more," said Silvester Langdale. "We have to look to the future now, and I bring news to cheer you in your misfortune, Helen; tidings that in their effect will, I hope, restore you to us, and to your proper sphere."

"Ah!" exclaimed Helen Lebar, joyously, but almost at the same instant drooping her head, as though some sudden thought had checked her joyousness.

"I have this day received a letter from the West Indies," continued Langdale, "by which I learn that we were wrongly

informed, and that your property was amongst that which escaped the general wreck that devastated the island."

Helen Lebar threw herself upon her knees and buried her face in her hands.

Silvester Langdale immediately went to her, and raised her from the ground, saying—

"Do not give way thus; calm yourself, you see that all will yet be well."

"Come, darling, come," said Augusta Langdale.

"Come! Come where?"

"To our home again."

"No, not now, not now," said Helen Lebar, proudly but sorrowfully.

"Not now, why not now?"

"No, my darling friend — my more than sister — ask your own heart the question why not now, and I shall be content with the answer."

No reference had been made to Severn

Barnes; his name had not been mentioned at all.

"I cannot understand your objection—is it that you are still infatuated?" said Silvester Langdale.

"Perchance so—if devotion can be so designated," said Helen Lebar, tearfully.

"Devotion! devotion to an object of deception — devotion to ingratitude — devotion to a shrine wherein lies black ingratitude — I cannot understand that devotion, Helen."

Silvester Langdale spoke with more energy in his voice than he had previously exhibited.

"Not now, Mr. Langdale, not now—it is devotion to misfortune—it is devotion to a holy love that yet will find itself enshrined in virtue."

"Then you would reward deception?" said Langdale, inquiringly.

"Nay, I would obliterate deception,

and in its place establish truth. No, Mr. Langdale, Severn Barnes may have wronged me, but he is afflicted now."

"Just retribution," said Silvester Langdale.

"Be it so, Mr. Langdale; but still there is something paramount even to my present love; the Nemesis you allude to may be the means of introducing justice. The possessions which I inherit are restored to me—let it not be denied to me—oh, you would not deny it to me, Mr. Langdale! — to be magnanimous; but above all, let not the unborn child be the inheritor of retribution for a parent's wrong," and Helen Lebar again fell upon the neck of Augusta Langdale.

* * * * *

There is an angel sitting by the bedside of Severn Barnes. That angel soothes his tribulation as she places her hand upon his brow; her voice has purified his

soul—through her eyes he can look into the heaven of consolation — the past is dying away into the shadows, and the future yet may brightly shine, through the ministrations of that devoted WIFE.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GREAT TRIAL AT THE ASSIZES.

The assize town in which the trial that is to decide the ownership of the estate which Lord Montalban has for so long a period enjoyed, is bustling, and almost in a state of excitement, for it is the morning of the day on which the trial has been fixed to commence. It is a trial that at the moment is interesting the whole county, for although the immediate issue raised is trivial in itself, it will in reality decide a question that is, to the parties interested, a momentous one indeed. The quaint old court-house at which the assizes are held, and which is occasionally

devoted to all sorts of purposes, from that of a police-court up to passing addresses to the Crown or sentence of death upon a malefactor, is crowded with a motley gathering. The bar is represented in all its phases, for there is an abstruse chapter in English law to be studied, and so students of all shades and complexions, physical and mental, are there, thronged around that green-baized table that is in the well of that quaint old court. There are the Queen's Counsel of the circuit, and the one Serjeant thereof; there are the old men who have grown grey in traversing that circuit for years and years past, and who have never had their hearts gladdened with a brief practice; there are the young men who are rising at the bar, and the young men who hope to rise; and lastly, there is a sprinkling of those who follow and support the great moustache and whisker movement, and

fierce, determined, and mostly good-looking fellows they are; and they have some fine whiskers amongst them, notwithstanding the anathema which certain profound old lawless and malignant lips have sought to pronounce against the face of nature. But that which the hand of the barber has not succeeded in suppressing will scarcely be uprooted by the senile malediction of prejudiced authority. In many respects the judges of our land most worthily adorn the judgment-seat, but occasionally there are exhibited upon that lofty seat narrow prejudices, illiberal views, a tenacious stickling for old and useless and obsolete forms, which grievously detract from that solemnity which should hedge a judge.

Silvester Langdale is the leading counsel for the defendant, of course; and if ever counsel felt an absorbing interest in the case of his client, Silvester Langdale did

for his on this occasion; a real interest, a heartfelt, soul-devoting interest and anxiety, and not that kind of interest which, in a hateful and degrading dictum, was, it is said, prescribed by a well-known, venerable, and noble legist—that the advocate, in the cause of his unknown client, should sell himself body and soul, commit constructive perjury, become a liar and a cheat, and in all respects identify himself with any crime he might be paid to palliate and defend. The advocate, in his private capacity, must be above suspicion, but as a public man, and therefore as a public character, no dishonour can be too degrading for him to stoop to, provided he is paid for the degradation. That dictum has been issued and endorsed by high authority, and is acted up to rigidly every day.

Silvester Langdale may be said to have been in the position of his own counsel,

and to be defending his own right; and in reality there was little necessity for that heavy fee that was marked upon his brief, and which caused the briefless ones around him, who chanced to cast their eyes upon the figures, to heave that sigh which may be taken to indicate that kind of hope which maketh the heart unwell.

And Augusta Langdale was in the ancient court-house too, drawn thither by a feeling far more potent than that of ordinary curiosity, and she was in one of the side galleries, where she could with facility see, but was scarcely seen.

Lord Montalban was in the court too, looking, so the people said, as unconcerned as though he had been in a theatre, and had come to see a comedy. He was accommodated with a seat upon the bench beside the learned judge, in accordance with that glorious principle of English jurisprudence which recognises no dis-

tinction of persons! All are equal in the eye of the law; but the law is not exempt from having infirmities, and so its eye is sometimes short-sighted, that of course being one of the well-known, because often quoted, circumstances over which there cannot by possibility be any control.

There could not, if the parties had had the choice themselves of the whole of the judicial bench, have been a more appropriate judge for the trial of the cause than the one on this occasion presiding on the circuit in which the assize town was situated. He was a stickler for old forms, although he despised beards and those who wore them. He had a wholesome abhorrence of modern statutes, and a lively sense of the paramount importance of old precedents. Time immemorial was an article of his legal faith; modern innovation was with him the principle of dissent. If he had been consistent and

could have squared his legal with his religious faith, he should have been a Jew, or at least a Papist; but as he was neither the one nor the other—he was a member of the Church as by law established—there was his great religious bond of faith; and he looked upon all other creeds as being entitled to the law's Palladium, but not to her smiles.

The great cause that was about to be tried was one in which, in all probability, much argument would arise; and so the judge upon the bench was indeed an appropriate presiding functionary, for he was especially happy in all such cases, seeing that if upon any doubtful point there should happen to be no statute-law immediately applicable, and his revered time immemorial principle failed to solve the difficulty, he strengthened his mind by making the law which he wanted. Hence he may be said to have ruled a kind of

judicial Jupiter in what is called Chamber practice, where he would with the utmost facility create law to meet contingencies of any kind. When he was "Judge at Chambers," *in dubiis* could never be pleaded.

Mr. Baron Coalpoint having taken his seat in the court, bowing respectfully as he did so to Lord Montalban, and profoundly to the gentlemen of the bar who did not wear whiskers, the names of the jury for the great cause, which had been specially appointed, were called over. It was a Special jury—the speciality of course consisting in the members thereof being better off, in a worldly point of view, than the members of the Petit jury, usually designated Common. The principle adopted in the selection of the special jury panel is to take the house and not the occupier for the jury; but at all events that would appear to be the guiding principle with regard to pro-

vincial special juries; and here we have a touching instance of the fine distinctions of our native law. If a man breaks down your hedge, and allows his pig free access to your growing cabbages, you have the cherished privilege of demanding a special jury specially to assess your damages; but if the same offender against you should poison, by slow and diabolical but occult means, a near relative—say your wife or brother—the privilege is very properly withheld from you, and you are required to rely upon the doctrine of chances with regard to the degree of intelligence which may happen to pervade the common jury that the functionary of the court may have selected to "well and truly try and true deliverance make between our Sovereign Lady the Queen and the prisoner at the bar."

The names of the gentlemen of the special jury have been called over, and

they have taken their seats, which they find to be very hard and uncomfortable, in the jury-box, and the junior counsel for the plaintiff having opened the record and then shut himself up, the leader of the circuit opens the case to the jury; and in doing so, he informs them that there is a vast and momentous question involved in it, which will require more than ordinary intelligence to decide, and therefore the jury which he then had the honour of addressing had been called together. The conviction he entertains as to the amount of intelligence that the gentlemen of the jury before him possess is so strong, that it removes that anxiety which he would otherwise feel in having interests of such momentous magnitude committed to his charge as those which were involved in the case about to be investigated. It was a case in which a nobleman of high standing and long

ancestral descent, was the defendant; and a person in humble life, but still, as it would be shown in the course of the progress of the case, of gentle birth notwithstanding, was plaintiff.

"Do you mean by gentle birth, that she can trace her lineage to any antiquity?" asked the learned judge, solemnly.

"It will be a part of my case to show that, my lord."

"Very good," said the sagacious judge, in a tone which indicated that he thought a great deal more of the plaintiff than he did before.

The learned counsel for the plaintiff proceeded with his opening address, and informed the jury that the claim of the plaintiff rested upon the terms of a will, which were rather peculiar in themselves, but which in themselves were plain, distinct, and simple enough. It would appear that the estate, which was at

present held by the right honourable Lord Viscount Montalban, had, previous to his lordship coming of age, been the property of a somewhat eccentric individual, who by his will had left the property to his son's wife, contingent upon her having a son, and that son living to the age of twenty-one years, in default thereof to go to his brother. The plaintiff in this case was the wife of the son of that old man. It would seem, according to his instructions, that the son of the old man being dead, it would have passed to the brother as a matter of course in the case of there being no son of the plaintiff, even if there had been no will bequeathing, in the contingency he had mentioned, the estate to that brother. That brother had, it seemed, acted under the will as though no son of the plaintiff had been born, although such son had been born, had entered into the enjoy-

ment of the property, and had finally sold it to the trustees of Lord Montalban, the defendant in this suit. Of course the jury would reasonably ask upon what ground the plaintiff now, after so many years, made the claim which had been placed upon the record. Upon that point he was instructed to prove that when the son of the plaintiff was of tender age he was surreptitiously removed from the care of the plaintiff, she herself abandoned, and she had never been able to discover where her child had been taken until lately. By one of those inscrutable agencies by which human justice was frequently worked out, and into which he need not enter, the child, now a young man, had been discovered; and although the plaintiff had failed to recognise in the young man of full age the child of five or six years, yet he (the learned counsel) was instructed that he should be

enabled to offer such conclusive proofs to the jury as to leave no room for doubt upon the subject. The noble defendant was fortunate, not only in having retained the services of, but in being closely connected with, one of the most brilliant forensic advocates of this or of any other age, and to him had been entrusted the defence of this most remarkable, not to say romantic case. All, therefore, that brilliant eloquence, sagacious analysis, and subtle reasoning could do, would be done in behalf of the noble defendant; but still the facts were so indisputable, the evidence that would be adduced would be so conclusive, and the entire justice of the case made so clear, that the jury, under the direction of his Lordship, could come to no other conclusion than an unconditional verdict in favour of the plaintiff.

"Was this property long in the family

of the testator, under whose will the plaintiff claims?" inquired the learned judge very solemnly, looking over his spectacles at the grave counsel who had just resumed his seat.

"My lord, I am instructed that it had been in the family for some generations," replied the learned counsel, after a few words of hurried consultation with a sharp, wiry-looking individual behind him.

"Oh!" said the judge, looking grave indeed, and then turning to the jury he said—"I merely asked the question, gentlemen of the jury, for my own private information, and not as being material to the issue that you have to try."

The foreman of the jury bowed very profoundly to his lordship, and murmured something which nobody could hear, while some of the other jurymen looked a little confused, as though they

were not quite sure whether they ought not to bow to the judge as well as the foreman.

A great deal of time was occupied, first of all in proving that the will, upon which the whole case turned, was duly proved according to law, in the Registry Courts of the Most Reverend Father in God the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury; and it having been proved that the will had been duly placed under the holy care of the Right Reverend Father in God, a great deal more time was taken up in a discussion—whether that was the proper time for reading the will, even supposing it ought to be read at all; or whether certain witnesses should be examined first, and the last deed of transfer read.

After an elaborate argument upon these points, the learned judge delivered a very oracular judgment upon the point, in which he reviewed certain precedents

with which he was acquainted, and which were established at Westminster somewhere about the time of Chaucer, and concluded by saying that, as in the present case it was quite clear that the will of the testator, who was the former holder of the estate, was the oldest document that appeared in the cause, he could have no doubt that that was the one that ought to be the first read. If, however, the learned counsel for the defence should be of opinion that the decision was not in strict accordance with precedent, upon which the learned judge had not the slightest shadow of a shade of doubt, he would reserve the point, and the learned counsel could have it argued before the full court on the first day of term.

Silvester Langdale said he was much obliged to his lordship, but he did not wish to raise the point; it was of little importance.

"A question of precedent has been involved, let me observe," said the judge, quite awfully.

The technical matters having been duly disposed of, to the satisfaction of the precedent-loving judge, the real business of the case commenced by the counsel for the plaintiff calling as a witness the plaintiff herself.

She was a middle-aged woman, upon whose face the unmistakable marks of care were prominently stamped. Her features were prominent, were very marked, and evidently had once been handsome. All the features were large when looked at singly, but they blended harmoniously together in perfect symmetry. Silvester Langdale was irresistibly struck by the countenance the moment he saw it, and the idea that was suggested to his mind was mentally expressed in the observation, "the woman is not a vulgar

claimant." Indeed, such were the very words that he used in a note that he handed over the table up to Lord Montalban, as soon as the plaintiff made her appearance in the box.

Her examination in chief was not a very lengthy one. She deposed that she was the widow of the son of the testator, who had bequeathed the estate; she had had a son, who, when about five years old, was stolen from her, and of whom she never could obtain any tidings until recently; and that was nearly the extent of her testimony.

Then came the cross-examination, and that, although it was anticipated that it would be strong, searching, and protracted, was, as it turned out, brief also.

"Now, woman, look at me," said Silvester Langdale, as he commenced his cross-examination.

The request was necessary, perhaps,

for she had held her head down during her examination in chief.

As she held her head up, and looked in the face of Silvester Langdale, a sudden pallor suffused her own countenance, and there was a wildness in her eyes which was not there before.

"You have only seen this so-called son of yours, you say, lately?" said Silvester Langdale.

"I have," feebly answered the witness.

"Speak up—my Lord and the jury must hear you as well as I, you know," cried the counsel for the defendant.

The witness does not speak up as she is desired, but she is gazing upon Silvester Langdale's face as though she were spell-bound.

"Are you mad, woman?" cries Silvester Langdale, in a tone of irritation.

"O God! I fear I shall go mad:" exclaimed the woman passionately, and still

gazing with intensity upon Silvester Langdale.

"What is the meaning of this strange behaviour?" inquired the learned judge of the witness.

"Remorse, let us hope, my Lord—remorse, even at the last hour, for the conspiracy to which she has been a party," said Silvester Langdale energetically.

"Remorse!" exclaimed the woman; "no, no, no; say that it is nature asserting her dominion over the heart; say that it is truth asserting itself irresistibly upon the soul. O God, my brain will burst!"

And the witness, clenching the iron rail before her, bowed down her head upon her hand.

There was a lengthened pause in the proceedings of the court.

"Now, pray be calm," said Silvester Langdale; "when did you discover this son of yours?"

"Not till this moment. My child, my child!" shrieked the woman and fell senseless in the witness box.

The utmost consternation and confusion were created in the court by this incident. The witness was borne senseless away, and the proceedings were of course suspended, and ultimately they were adjourned until the next day.

In the interval it was discovered that the action against Lord Montalban was founded in conspiracy, but the witness who had caused such a sensation in the court was no party to that conspiracy, nor was she cognizant of it. She had been made an instrument of, and a spurious son had been attempted to be foisted upon her. But nature was more potent than artifice.

The solicitors for the plaintiff at first believed that they had been foiled, but upon investigation they found that their

game was only being the more surely played. Before the assembling of the court the next day, they had taken steps to deprive Lord Montalban, the noble defendant, of the services of his son-in-law, for they had actually served him with a subpœna as a witness in the cause, and they had taken the same course with regard to old Nicholas Darvill, who lived at no great distance off.

Yes, it seemed ludicrous enough—but Silvester Langdale was compelled to appear in court, not as counsel, but as a witness. Nature in a woman's breast had instinctively revealed a secret that had been buried for twenty years. The witness of the previous day was his own mother—Nicholas Darvill supplied the necessary links in the chain of evidence which connected the brother of the testator of the strange will with the person who had placed Silvester Langdale in his

charge twenty years before; and so Lord Montalban's daughter's husband was declared by due course of law to be the real owner of the estate which Lord Montalban now enjoyed.

The verdict in the great cause was adverse to Lord Montalban, and yet he and his daughter and his daughter's husband felt something more than satisfaction; and as Augusta Langdale clasped her newfound mother to her arms, bright happiness unalloyed reigned over that strangely now united family.

But happiness, even when it is wholly unalloyed, is often rudely checked, even as it is sometimes suddenly produced.

CHAPTER XV.

LORD MONTALBAN AND MARL BASKERVILLE FACE TO FACE.

When Marl Baskerville set on foot the inquiries which resulted in the action at law that we have recorded in the last chapter, he little anticipated the almost astounding result that it would lead to. The issue that he had hoped for was the destruction of Lord Montalban, in whose ruin of course those connected with him would have been involved. Count Moule is continually in the society of the mysterious money-lender, and he has of late had opportunities enough of confirming his suspicion with regard to the state of Baskerville's mind; and since the trial, that

the man was morbid, lunatic, he had observed more conclusive evidence than before. Marl Baskerville was a lunatic, but his lunacy was characterised by intense cunning, and we might almost add, of strength of mind, anomalous and contradictory as the declaration may sound. He was so crafty that at times even Count Moule himself, spite of the unmistakable indications that he had observed, almost doubted that which was a conviction in his mind. The smouldering fire of lunacy was deeply hidden in the recesses of the money-lender's brain, but the Count had observed that now the simple mention of Lord Montalban's name was sufficient to rouse into a fierce flame those smouldering ashes, the remnants of a hope that had long since perished. In all things else, the money-lender was still the shrewd, calculating, deep-revolving man of the world, and he carried out those schemes

in which he was associated with Count Moule, with unerring sagacity and unflinching purpose. This was all that the Count cared for, and so, while the occult lunacy of his confederate did not affect those schemes, he was content to let it have its way, and to allow it to pass unnoticed and unchecked.

It is some days after the memorable trial, and the Count is with Marl Baskerville in the sombre room in Spring Gardens. They are discoursing upon certain plans which they have had in hand with regard to the Marchioness of Milltown, and there is trouble upon the countenance of the Count.

"The life she has led has been a merry one indeed," he is saying, "but it is clear that it will be a short one."

"Why do you think so?"

"I do not think—I am convinced of it."

"And so am I," said Marl Baskerville

between his teeth. "I have watched her —not as you have done. I have looked into her very heart, and you know why. And that instinct that is within me has told me that she is dying—dying like a retribution. Shall I tell you when the fatal shaft was hurled?"

"Do," said the Count, ill at ease, for he had reason to fear another paroxysm. He had forgotten that now the name of Marie Wingrave, Marchioness of Milltown, was terribly associated in the maniac's mind with that of Lord Montalban.

"The fatal shaft was first hurled the night that singing boy was destroyed upon the stage. Like a retribution, then she sickened as she saw her brother's blood gush out upon that stage, although she knew him not as her brother. She has been dying ever since. She was weakened some time ago, they say, by an accident down in the country. She is dying now, in

the midst of all her splendour. Again like an unjust retribution, for she knows neither kith nor kin save that brilliant marionette her husband. But that ignorance shall not be of any lengthened duration now. I have seen Langdale, and the secret has been confided to him, and he — and he," cried the excited man, "guess, if you can, what he has proposed."

"What?" inquired the Count eagerly.

"Why, he has proposed that we should make the revelation together — that it shall be done in the fiend's own house, and that it shall strike him down upon his own hearth. Yes, the mother shall be made known to the child—the child shall find a father, and each shall find a Nemesis."

"But how is this proposed to be carried out?" asked the Count.

"Oh, all in hospitable style," chuckled

the maniac hideously. "I am to dine there to-night—ay, this very night—and you are to accompany me."

"No, no, I cannot," said the Count peremptorily. Had he some vague and indefinable fear shadowing his mind? Perhaps he had.

There is a small, but an exceedingly select dinner party at Lord Montalban's, and Silvester Langdale is particularly gay thereat. A casual observer might have attributed this, perhaps, to the fact that he was in reality the lord of the estate which Lord Montalban enjoyed, but that was not the immediate cause of his high spirits. His noble father-in-law was about to be introduced, as he believed, to a new daughter. What a surprise it would be to him—what a strange and romantic affair it was — almost as strange and romantic as the issue of the trial for the estate!

How little can any of us look into the future.

Those who were at that dinner-table who knew Marl Baskerville—the Duke of Chaumontel was there—the Marquis of Milltown was there, and others who knew him—thought they had never seen him look so infirm. But over the wine he was gay, and they remarked, unusually loquacious, especially with Lord Montalban, whom he rallied over and over again at what he deemed his failing prowess with regard to the decanter. Lord Montalban was not the man to allow himself to be open to such raillery, and so by degrees he became more than usually excited.

It was near ten o'clock when Marl Baskerville, as though he had suddenly recollected something, said—

"Oh, by-the-bye, my lord, I have a

sort of a revelation to make. Let me have a few minutes' undisturbed conversation with you."

For an instant Lord Montalban looked at Silvester Langdale apprehensively, as though he feared that the required conversation would have reference to subjects upon which he had already consulted his son-in-law; the incidents of which consultation are recorded in a former chapter. As however there was an assuring smile upon Silvester Langdale's countenance, Lord Montalban's apprehensions were immediately dispelled, and he led the way to the chamber that looked out upon the park. The gas was lighted therein. Marl Baskerville had tarried for a moment in the hall, but almost immediately joined Lord Montalban, and carrying a small case in his hand, closing the door of the room and bolting it,

which, however, Lord Montalban did not observe.

"Now what's the revelation that you have to make to me?" said Lord Montalban, not altogether feeling at his ease.

"Do you remember your memorable Brighton wager?" inquired Marl Baskerville, standing erect at the table. There was no decrepitude about him now.

"Oh, it's some joke about that, is it?" said Lord Montalban, gaily.

"Concerning that, but no joke respecting it."

"What is it then?"

"You stole away a young, confiding loving girl.

"I did what I suppose is done every day," said Lord Montalban, laughing. "What is the meaning of this, Baskerville, may I ask?"

Lord Montalban, the gas-light is between you and your companion, or you

might see the terrible glare that is raging in those eyes, that appear to be looking into your very soul.

"That girl, so young, so confiding, so loving, had a daughter."

"Why rake up that at such a time as this?" demanded Lord Montalban, in agitation.

"As you had stolen away the mother, so was that daughter stolen away."

"I know it."

"But not whence carried."

"No! whence?" cried Lord Montalban.

"To infamy—to degradation!"

"How do you know this? and why have you not made it known to me before?" cried Lord Montalban, in a voice of agitation.

"How have I known this?" shouted Marl Baskerville, drawing himself up to his full height. "That young, confiding loving girl, whom you, like a dastard

thief stole away—nay, stir not; you shall hear me — that confiding, loving girl was my heart's betrothed—my soul's idol!"

Lord Montalban looks at the maniac before him as though the man had some secret charm to fix him powerless to the spot.

"By your libertine and wanton act my heart became crushed—my soul dead—and from that hour, Lord Montalban, I swore to track you down."

As with a convulsive effort Lord Montalban turns, as though he would summon assistance.

"Raise your voice to summon aid—as I see is your intent—and I denounce you, Lord Viscount Montalban!"

Lord Montalban pauses.

"Ay, denounce you, and drag you in your purple and fine linen to a culprit's cell."

"Baskerville, Baskerville, this is mas-

querading surely; what has produced this change in you?"

"Change in me! there is no change in me, but my soul must be relieved to-night. Yes, Lord Viscount Montalban, it is for me, at my own will, to drag you, a forger, to a culprit's cell."

No wonder that Lord Montalban writhes in agony.

"Nay, more, and you shall not be alone in your degradation. The daughter's husband shall be the companion in infamy of the daughter's father—ha, ha, ha!"

"God! what do you mean?" cried Lord Montalban, in anguish.

"Look upon these slips of paper, Lord Viscount Montalban," said Marl Baskerville, as he displayed the documents referred to, "they are forgeries—both of them; the one is forged by Lord Viscount Montalban, and the other is forged by

Silvester Langdale, barrister-at-law, and the name the barrister signs is Montalban."

How bitter is the anguish Lord Montalban suffers now.

"For escape there is one alternative, Lord Viscount Montalban," cried Marl Baskerville.

"Name it!" eagerly exclaimed Lord Montalban.

"It is not fitting that you and I should longer walk the earth together."

Those eyes are living balls of fire now.

"Here in this case are two pistols, the one is charged, the other blank; take your choice of the first, and we will end this deadly strife across the table."

Lord Montalban is scared, and his senses are almost gone, as he looks gasping across at Marl Baskerville.

"Dastard, do you hesitate? — away, then, to a felon's fate."

"No!" shouted Lord Montalban, desperate to madness.

He seized one of the pistols—Marl Baskerville instantly grasped the other; a moment, a flash, a ringing report, and Lord Montalban and Marl Baskerville both lay dead upon the floor.

Marl Baskerville in his mad excitement had loaded both the pistols.

But the dead money-lender had reasoned cunningly in his own mind. If he had drawn the blank pistol, Lord Montalban would have stood open to the charge of murder—the motive, possession of the forged acceptances; if Lord Montalban had drawn the blank pistol, the defence of Marl Baskerville would have been, that the duel was forced upon him by the deceased Lord, who desired to remove the damning evidence that was in the forged acceptances. Those terrible instruments, as terrible as the weapons

with which the mutual slaughter had just been committed, were lying upon the table—no hand to clutch them now.

The report of the two pistols was heard in the room above, and Silvester Langdale, with the Duke of Chaumontel, and the Marquis of Milltown, rushed down stairs, and burst into the room from which the noise proceeded, and there they at once saw the horrid tragedy that had been enacted.

As though some lucky impulse guided him, Silvester Langdale's eyes almost instantly fell upon the two acceptances that were lying upon the table, and he almost mechanically seized them. The act, of course, will be condemned; it was, of course, against the strict code of morals that should guide an honourable mind, so will it be reasoned, but it was better—perhaps upon the principle that out of evil good can come—that he should have

seized those papers. No one in all this world save himself knew of their existence—only two others had ever known of their existence, and those two were lying stark and dead at his feet. The act, therefore, of seizing those papers was not a strictly honourable one, but it was undoubtedly a natural one, and no human being that is living now would have acted otherwise, under the same circumstances. The Duke of Chaumontel, and his son, of course, were too much horror-struck at the ghastly sight that was before them to notice the pieces of paper that were on the table, terrible in their import as they were, although harmless in appearance enough, and if they had chanced to have observed them, they would have thought nothing of them.

Silvester Langdale saw at a glance what they were, and it was fortunate

presence of mind that impelled him to the act of seizing them: and when he was alone, some hours afterwards, and with an agitated heart examined those terrible documents, his first impulse was fervently to thank Providence that they had thus fallen in his way. Upon one of the documents he saw his own signature —a signature that he had never written; and then the scene with Lord Montalban came vividly before his mind, and the object of Lord Montalban's visit was thus made manifest.

The perspiration hung in heavy drops upon his brow as he made this examination. What an awful danger had he escaped! The very thought of the escape seemed almost as terrible as the escape itself.

There is a confused noise of wailing in the house of Lord Montalban, and one

long piercing shriek has been heard to echo through the house; and as the guardians of the public peace enter, Silvester Langdale is bearing the inanimate form of his wife up the staircase. The guardians of the public peace observing this, and having been informed that dreadful murder has been committed in the house, are under the impression that Silvester Langdale is bearing away the body of the victim, and one of them intimates that probably the gentleman is not aware that the body ought not to be removed.

"Go in there, man," said Silvester Langdale, pointing to the chamber of massacre, and thither the officers of the night go, and are, of course, utterly at a loss under the awful circumstances of the situation what to do; when it struck one of them perhaps it would be as well to

send for the divisional surgeon, and this suggestion was about to be acted upon by another officer, who was eager to be the first to carry the dreadful news out of doors, when the medical man of Lord Montalban's family, who had been sent for, arrived. He at once pronounced that life was entirely extinct in the bodies both of Lord Montalban and Marl Baskerville, and nothing remained but for the inquest to be held.

We need not trace the course of woe in that house of mourning. The inquest was duly held; the evidence merely proved that the witnesses knew nothing of the matter, and the jury could only arrive at an open verdict. The newspapers teemed with discussions of the awful tragedy; the writers, one and all, came to the conclusion that the two men had simply fought a duel across the table,

long homilies were read upon duelling and the code of honour, and the matter gradually died out of the public mind until it was entirely overshadowed by some new horror.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST SCENE IN THE LIFE OF MARIE WINGRAVE.

The gloom of the terrible event that happened in Lord Montalban's house is becoming less in its intensity as time wears on—Time, the great obliterator, whose unerring finger rubs out inscriptions upon brass, and crumbles panegyrics that are proclaimed in marble out into obscurity—whose unseen hand smooths out the sad remembrance of a dread calamity, and pointing onward to the future, turns sorrow into hope. Augusta Langdale is changed in this short time, not in

her beauty—not in the sweet graces of her mind, but in the attributes that were a kind of contrast to her nobleness of heart and purity of spirit. The calamity that had fallen upon her house had chastened her, and as she once could not brook denial of any desire, no matter what, that she might form, so did she now strive hopefully to suppress all those desires which reason coming to her aid always now told her should not be indulged. She was no longer an extravagant wife as she once was to an indulgent husband. Her fragile fingers no longer were engaged in forging chains upon her husband that might in years, far off as yet, crush him down to ruin. That husband happily was no longer a Man in Chains. The dread calamity in Park Lane had worked a salutary change in him, more striking than in the case of his wife. The expe-

rience of a life had been gained to him in a few short hours, and now he was free —free in his heart and soul, erect before the world—a man.

And other changes have taken place in that family circle—and changes still are imminent. The gay throng in Rotten Row goes on in its shining and glittering stream as usual. To the observer on the shores of that bright stream, the people are the same therein, but those whom we have noted specially, in this our record of their lives, are no longer there, and very shortly their absence will be forgotten quite.

The name of Marie Wingrave has died out of all remembrance, and now that of the brilliant Marchioness of Milltown is beginning to fall into the oblivion of the forgotten past.

It is fading fast away through that

darkened chamber that is not far away from the gay scene, that chamber from which the glaring light is now excluded, as the death-shadow is deepening therein.

Oh, what a change is there presented! When we saw thee last, Marie Wingrave, Marchioness of Milltown, thou wert glittering in thy beauty, in that gay opera house in which thy brother, then unknown, was suddenly struck down by a retributive agency. The world of fashion was shining all around thee, and its glory seemed to be concentrated upon thee. The brilliant throng that was all around thee, as they looked upon thee, saw thee as but the beauty raised to a great estate, and through their eyes they paid thee and thy surroundings homage, even as they would have spurned thee if from thy great elevation thou hadst had

a sudden fall. Of such is that bright world of fashion—

> That world insatiate in whose harsh decrees
> Black wrongs prescriptive rank as pageantries;
> Where mystic deeds the right of reverence claim,
> In tyrant custom's oft polluted name.
> Deluded hopes—crushed aspirations these,
> Are small amidst thy thousand miseries.

Is that gasping form, with terribly conspicuous and still glittering eyes, that we now see emaciated upon a luxurious couch, the once gay, thoughtless, and brilliant ornament of Rotten Row, at once spurned and eagerly sought after, flattered and vilified, denounced and courted? Is that the once bright Marie Wingrave, the sparkling Marchioness of Milltown? Oh, Fate, art thou but another name that Nemesis should bear!

Strange assemblage round that bed of death—a strange union of family ties that bed of death has cemented; for in that

chamber, besides the professional adviser of the great Ducal family, are Augusta Langdale and her husband, Severn Barnes and his wife, and the mother of the dying girl who lies gasping in their midst.

There is a feeble, almost inarticulate voice whispering from that bed of death, and a small, tapering hand is directed to the side of the couch; the dying sister would wish to clasp her sister's hand even as she dies, and such the whisper that the dying voice conveys; and still it has another dying hope to gratify, another small, attenuated, and snowy hand is held out on the other side, and the dying sister whispers that she would wish to clasp, even while she dies, a brother's hand, and so Augusta Langdale and Severn Barnes, on either side of that couch of death, take each a snowy hand, but ere they can raise them to their lips

the unerring mandate issues, and death shuts out the world from those unclosed eyes that still seem gazing on that scene of grief.

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Our story is told. Silvester Langdale still continues the fortunate man, and is now a man of fortune—indeed strikingly demonstrating the truth of the old adage, but he is no longer a man in chains. Bitterly has he learnt that he might strain good fortune, and he has become wise in time, and looks proudly towards that official life for which he in all probability is destined.

The Duke of Chaumontel has been heard to say that he always thought his daughter-in-law must have had gentle blood in her veins, but he must take care that the young fool, meaning his son, did not make such a mistake again. That

brilliant young nobleman did not at all take his wife's death to heart; he had indeed practically abandoned her when she became ill, and at the very moment that she was dying he was taking a faultless new suit of clothes out for a drive in the Park.

THE END.

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